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THE WOOING of CALVIN PARKS

Laura E. Richards

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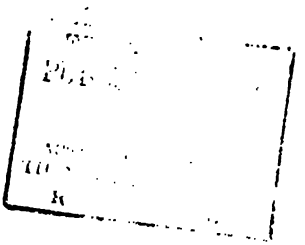

CALVIN PARKS.

THE WOOING OF CALVIN PARKS

By LAURA E. RICHARDS

Author of "Captain January," "Melody," "Mrs. Tree," "Geoffrey Strong," etc.

ILLUSTRATED

BOSTON DANA ESTES & COMPANY PUBLISHERS

CALVIN PARKS.

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THE WOOING OF CALVIN PARKS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCING THE PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

"If I'm not mistaken," said Calvin Parks, "this is the ro'd where Sam and Sim used to live!"

He checked his horse and looked about him. "And there — well, I'm blowed if that ain't the house now. Same old pumpkin-color; same old well-sweep; same old trees; it certinly is the house. Well!"

He looked earnestly at the house, which seemed to give him a friendly look in return; a large, comfortable yellow house, with windows of cheerful inquiry, and a door that came as near smiling as a door can. Two huge elms mounted guard over it, and

touched tips with a group of splendid willows that clustered round the ample barnyard; the front yard was green and smooth, with a neat flagstone path; a vast and friendly-looking dog lay on the broad doorstep; everything about the place looked comfortable and sociable.

"If that ain't a pictur'," said Calvin Parks, "I never see one, that's all."

He drove into the yard, and clambered rather slowly out of his wagon. He was a tall, light-limbed, active-looking man, but the wheels seemed to be in his way.

"I never shall get used to this rig," he muttered; "I'd ought to have a rope and tayckle to hi'st me out."

He cast a disapproving look at the wagon, and hurried toward the house. The vast dog rose, shook himself, yawned, and sniffed approvingly at his trousers.

"That's right, son!" said Calvin. "A friend is a friend, in pants or tails! Now

let's see where the boys be. I must wipe my feet good, though, or I shall have the old lady after me!"

He opened the front door; and after casting a look of friendly recognition round the hall, tapped on the door at his left.

"Come in!" said a voice.

"Sam!" said Calvin Parks; and he stepped into the room.

"How are you, Sam?" he began. "How are you — why, where's Sim?" he added in an altered tone. "Where's your Ma?"

A little man in snuff-brown clothes, with a red flannel waistcoat, came forward.

"Calvin Parks," he said, "don't tell me this is you!"

"I won't!" said Calvin. "I'll tell you it's old John Tyseed if that'll do you any good. What I want to know is, where's the rest of you? Don't tell me there's anything happened to your Ma and Sim, Sam Sill!"

The little man cast a curious look toward

a door that stood ajar not far from where he sat. He was silent a moment, and then said in a half whisper, "Ma is gone, Calvin!"

"Gone!" repeated the visitor. "What do you mean by gone?"

"Dead!" said the little man. "Departed. No more."

"Sho!" said Calvin Parks. "Is that so? Well, I'm sorry to hear it, Sam! And I'm — well, astounded is the word. Your Ma gone! Well, now! she was one, somehow or other of it, never seemed as if she *could* go."

"I expect," said Mr. Samuel Sill in the same subdued tone, "she is with the blessed;" he reflected a moment, and added, "and with father!"

"To be sure! naturally!" said Calvin Parks reassuringly. "How long since you laid her away, Sam?"

"We laid her away," said Sam, "a year ago, Calvin. She'd been poorly for a long

spell, droopin' kind of; nothing to take a holt of. Kep' up round and done the work, but her victuals didn't relish, nor yet they didn't set. She knew her time was come. She said to me and — the other one," (again he cast a curious look toward the open door), "sittin' in this very room — 'Boys,' she says, 'my stummick is leavin' me; and without a stummick I have no wish to remain, nor yet I don't believe it would be wished. I expect I am about to depart this life.'"

"I want to know!" murmured Calvin Parks sympathetically. "She come as close to it as that, did she?"

"About twice't a week," the little man continued, "she'd call us to come in after she was in bed, and say she'd most likely be gone in the mornin', and to be good boys, and keep the farm up as it should be. First for a time we tried to reason her out of it like, for the Lord didn't seem in no

hurry, nor yet we weren't; but one night she seemed set on it, told us goodbye, and all the rest of it. 'Well, mother!' I says, 'if you see father, tell him the hay's all in!' I says. Sure enough, come morning she was gone. Cut down like a — well!" he paused again and reflected. "I don't know as you'd call Ma exactly a flower, nor yet was she what you'd call real fruity, though ripe."

"Call it grain!" said Calvin Parks gravely. "First crop oats, or good winter wheat; either of them, Sam, would represent your Ma good. Well, I certinly am astounded to find that she is gone. But that don't tell me the rest of it, Sam. Where's Sim?"

"Sim," replied the little man, turning his eyes toward the open door; "Sim is — "

At this moment a singular sound came from beyond the door; a sound half cough, half call, and all cackle.

"That's Sim!" said Mr. Sam. "You'll find him in there!"

Calvin Parks's large brown eyes seemed to grow quite round; he stared at the little man for a moment; then "Red-top and timothy!" he muttered; "there's something queer here!" and stepped quickly into the other room.

A stranger would have said, here was a juggler's trick. The little snuff-colored man sitting hunched in the low chair was apparently the same man, but he had changed his red waistcoat for a black one, and had whisked himself in some unaccountable way into another room. But Calvin Parks knew better.

"How are you, Sim?" he said.

"Calvin," said the second little man, "I am pleased to see you, real pleased! Be seated! In regards to your question, I am middlin', sir, only middlin'."

Calvin Parks sat down, his eyes still

round and staring. "What's the matter?" he asked abruptly.

"Some thinks it's lumbago," said the little man; "and more calls it neurology. There is them," he added cautiously, "as has used the word tuber-clossis; I don't hold with that myself, but I'm doctorin' for all three, not to take no chances."

"All that be blowed!" said Calvin Parks. "What's the matter between you two? Why are you sittin' here and Sam in t'other room, you that have set side by side ever since you knew how to sit? Siamese Twins you've been called ever since born you was; dressed alike, fed alike, and reared alike; and now look at you! What's the matter, I say?"

The little man cast a look toward the door, a duplicate of the look which Calvin Parks had seen cast from the other side of it. Then he leaned forward, and fixed his sharp gray eyes on his visitor.

"Calvin Parks," he said, "you never was a twin!"

"No, I warn't!" said Calvin Parks.

The little man waved his hand. "That's all I've got to say!" he said. "We was. That's the situation. I've nothin' against Samuel, nor he as I knows on against me; but we have had a sufficiency of each other, and we are havin' us a rest, Calvin. We eat together, but otherwise we don't. But I'll tell you one thing," he added, leaning forward and dropping his voice, while his eyes narrowed to pinpoints. "When I don't like a man, I don't like him any better for bein' twin to me, I like him wuss!"

He leaned back again, and then repeated aloud, "Not that I've anything against Samuel, or fur as I know, Samuel against me."

"Well! may I be scuttled," said Calvin

Parks, "if ever I see the beat of this! Why, Sim Sill — "

At this moment another door opened behind him, and a clear, pleasant voice said,

"Dinner's ready, Cousin Sim! Cousin Sam, dinner's ready!"

Mr. Simeon Sill made a gesture of introduction. "Calvin," he said, "let me make you acquainted with my cousin Miss Sands!"

Calvin Parks rose and made his best bow. "Miss Hands," he said, "I am pleased to meet you, I'm sure!"

CHAPTER II

BROTHERLY WAYS

"YOU'LL stay to dinner, Cal?" said Mr. Sim.

"Calvin, you'll eat dinner with us?" cried Mr. Sam.

Calvin Parks looked at Miss Sands, and saw hospitality beaming in her face.

"Thank ye, Sim;" he said, "I'm obliged to you, Sam; I'll stay with pleasure, Miss Hands!"

It was a singular meal. Mary Sands sat at the head of the table, with all the dishes before her, and helped the three men largely to the excellent boiled dinner. Calvin Parks faced her at the foot, and the twins sat on either side. They talked cheerfully with their visitor and Miss Sands, but did not address each other directly.

Calvin remarked upon the excellence of the beef. "Fancy brisket, ain't it?" he asked.

"Yes!" replied Mr. Sim. "It's the best cut on the critter for cornin'."

Mr. Sam looked at his cousin. "Tell him I don't agree with him!" he said.

"Cousin Sim, Cousin Sam don't agree with you!" said Mary Sands placidly.

"Tell him the aitch bone is better!" continued Mr. Sam with some heat.

"He says the aitch bone is better!" repeated Mary Sands.

"Tell him it ain't!" said Mr. Sim.

"Cousin Sim says it ain't, Cousin Sam," said Mary, "and that's enough on the subject."

She spoke with calm and cheerful authority; the twins glowered at the corned beef in silence.

"Speakin' of critters," said Calvin Parks

hastily, "how many head are you carryin' now, boys?"

There was no reply. Looking at Miss Sands, her eyes directed his glance to Mr. Sam.

"How many head are you carryin', Sam?" he repeated.

"Twenty!" replied Mr. Sam.

"That's a nice herd," said Calvin. "Hereford, be they?"

"Holstein!" said Sam. "They're the best milkers, and the best beef critters too."

Mr. Sim looked at Mary Sands with kindling eyes. "Tell him it ain't so!" he said. "Tell him he knows better!"

"Cousin Sim says it ain't so, and you know better, Cousin Sam," said Mary Sands.

"Tell him he knows wuss!" grunted Mr. Sam.

"Cousin Sam says you know wuss,

Cousin Sim, and that will do!" said Mary Sands quietly.

It was the same at dessert. Calvin praised the admirable quality of the pie.

"Now this," he said, "is my idee of a squash pie. It isn't slickin' up and tryin' to look like custard, nor yet it don't make believe it's pumpkin; it just says, 'I am a squash pie, and if there's a better article you may let me know.'"

"I'm real pleased you like it," said Mary Sands modestly; "it's Cousin Lucindy's recipe. She must have been a master hand at pies."

"She certinly was!" said Mr. Sam. "Squash and pumpkin and cranberry, Ma was fustrate in all; but mince was her best holt."

"Tell him it warn't," said Mr. Sim, fixing his cousin with a burning eye. "Tell him her apple bet it holler."

"Cousin Sim says it warn't, Cousin Sam,

and her apple bet it holler," repeated Mary Sands cheerfully.

"Tell him he's a turnip-head!" said Mr. Sam.

"I don't repeat no calling names," said Mary Sands. "Mr. Parks, will you have some more of the pie? Cousin Sam, another piece? Cousin Sim? well, then, the meal is finished, Cousins!"

Each twin, as he rose from the table, cast a glance of invitation at Calvin Parks; but he hastily seized a dish. "I'm going to help Miss Hands clear off," he said; and he followed Mary Sands into the kitchen.

"Oh! Mr. Parks," said Mary, "you no need to do that! I'm well used to washing dishes!"

"I should suppose you was," responded Calvin Parks gallantly, "but if you'll let me help, Miss Hands, it would be an accommodation, now it would. Fact is," he continued, "I expect I shall bust if I don't

find out what this all means, and I want you to tell me. How long have the boys been actin' this way?"

"How long?" repeated Mary Sands. "Ever since I come. Haven't they always been so?"

"Always been so?" repeated Calvin Parks. "Why, Miss Hands — why —" he looked about him helplessly. "Well, I am blowed!" he said plaintively. "I'll have to ask you to excuse the expression, Miss Hands, but I really am! Perhaps I'd better tell you how things used to be in this house, and then you can see how — how blowed I am at findin' them as they be."

"I should be real pleased if you would!" said Mary Sands. "I've been wonderin' and wonderin', ever since I come, but there's no near neighbors, you know, and I don't know as I should have cared to ask 'em if there had been; but you are a friend of both, I see, and it seems different."

"I'll wash to your wipin'," said Calvin Parks, taking off his coat and rolling up his shirt sleeves, "and we can talk as we go; I'm an old hand at dishes too. Well! Friend of both? well, I should remark! I lived on the next ro'd, not more'n half a mile across lots. You might have seen a burnt cellar hole? — Well, that was our home. First I remember of Sam and Sim was them sittin' together in their chair. 'Twas a queer chair, made o' purpose to hold the two of 'em. There they set, and tell 'tother from which was more than I could do, or anybody else for that matter, except their Ma. They might ha' been nine then, and I s'pose I was four or five. I rec'lect I went up to 'em and says, 'Be you one boy cut in two?' Cur'us things children are, sure enough. They was dressed alike, then and always; fed alike, and reared alike, every human way of it. Doctored alike, too, poor young ones! One time when they was

babies the wrong one got the medicine, and after that Ma Sills always dosed 'em both, whichever was sick. 'There's goin' to be no partiality!' she says; 'the Lord made them children off the same last, and they're goin' to stay the same!' Why, Miss Hands, she wouldn't so much as allow they could *think* different. If they got to scrappin', same as all boys do, y'know, Ma would take 'em by the scruff of their necks and haul 'em up to the looking-glass. 'Look at there!' she'd say. 'Do you see them boys? do you see the way they look? Now I give you to understand that your souls inside is just as much alike as your bodies outside. I ain't sure but it's two halves of the same soul,' she'd say, 'and do you think I'm goin' to let 'em quarrel? You make up and love each other pretty right away, or I'll take the back of the hairbrush to you both!'

"So they'd make up; they had to!

There! Ma Sills certinly did rule the roost, and no mistake. She'd been a widder ever since the boys were a year old, so she had to do for herself and them, and she done it. She was a master hand; a master hand!"

He shook his head, and washed the platter vigorously.

"Did it keep on that way after they grew up?" asked Mary Sands.

"Did it?" repeated Calvin. "Yes, it did! Neither one of 'em could stand against their Ma. Folks thought the boys would marry, and that would break it up like, but Ma wouldn't have that. 'When I find two girls as much alike as they is boys,' she'd say, 'we'll talk about gettin' married; till then they're wife enough for each other.'

"That was when Sam was takin' notice of Ivy Bell. She was a girl from Vermont, come visitin' Ammi Bean's folks; her

mother was sister to Ammi. She was a pretty, slim little creatur', and I expect Sam thought she was all creation for a spell; but she never could tell him from Sim, and Sim didn't take to her no way, shape or manner. That suited their Ma first rate, and she'd take a day when Sam was off to market, and then she'd send Sim on an errant down to Bean's. I rec'lect I was there one day when he come, — I guess I was some taken with Ivy myself, for she was a pretty piece. When she see him she begun to roll her eyes and simper up the way gals do — I ask your pardon, Miss Hands! I don't mean all gals, nor I shouldn't want you to think it."

"Thank you, Mr. Parks!" said Mary demurely; "I won't!"

"Well, she did," said Calvin; "no two ways about that. 'Good mornin', Mr. Sills,' she says, 'was you wishin' to see anyone?'

"'Yes!' says Sim, 'I want to see Mr. Bean.'

"'He's down in the medder,' says Ivy; and then she kind o' hung down her head and looked up at him sideways. 'I don't suppose there's anyone else would do instead, Mr. Sills?'

"'No, there ain't!' says Sim; and off he legged it to the medder."

"My!" said Mary Sands, "What did she say to that?"

"Why, I snickered right out in meetin'," said Calvin. "I just couldn't help it; and she was so mad she whisked into the house and slammed the door in my face, and that was the last *I* saw of Ivy.

"But next time poor old Sam come along, slicked up for courtin', with his heart in his vest pocket all ready to hand out, why, he got the door in his face, too, and had to start in all over again. Well, sir — I beg your pardon, ma'am,

or I should rather say miss — that was pretty much the way things was when I quit home, and that was pretty much the way I expected to find 'em when I come back. It didn't seem as if a trifle of fifteen years was going to make much difference in Ma Sill, nor yet in Sam and Sim; they seemed sort of permanent, don't you know, like the old well-sweep, or the big willows. I s'pose when Ma was laid away the boys commenced to feel as if they was two minds as well as two bodies. You don't know what started them actin' this way?"

Miss Sands reflected a moment.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she said, "if it was their vests."

"Their vests?" repeated Calvin.

"Yes! You noticed Cousin Sam had on a red one and Cousin Sim a black one? Well — but suppose I tell you my end of it, Mr. Parks, just as it come to me."

"I should be fairly pleased to death if

you would!" said Calvin Parks. "That's what I've been layin' for right along. Yes, I spotted them vests first thing, I guess it's the first stitch ever they had on that was anyways different. Well! you was going to say?"

Mary Sands was silent a moment, gazing thoughtfully at the blue platter she held.

"I'm a lone woman!" she said at last. "I was an only child, and parents died when I was but young. I've kept house these ten years for my uncle over to Tupham Corners. He was a widower with one son, and a real good man; like a father to me, he was. Last year he died, and left the farm to Reuben, — that was his son, — and the schooner, a coasting schooner he was owner of, to me. I expect he thought — " she paused, and a bright color crept into her warm brown cheek; "well," she continued, "anyhow, Reuben and I didn't hit it off real well, and I left. I was staying with friends

when a letter come from Cousins statin' their Ma had passed away and would I come to keep house for them. I'd never visited here, but Cousin Lucindy was own cousin to my mother, and we'd met at conference and like that, but yet I'd never seen the boys. Well, I thought about it a spell, and I thought I'd come and try, and if we suited, well and good, and if not there'd be no bones broke. So I packed up and come over by the stage. Well!"

She stopped to laugh, a little mellow tinkling laugh. "I guess I sha'n't forget my first sight of Cousins. I come up the steps kind of quiet. The door stood open, and I knocked and waited a minute, hearin' voices; then I stepped inside the hall. The front sittin'-room door was open too, and Cousins was standin' back to it, them same brown backs, each one the other over again, and one of them was holdin' a red vest in each hand.

I coughed, but they didn't hear me, and he went right on speakin'.

"'Ma bought this red flannel at the bankrupt sale,' he said. 'She allowed 'twould keep us in vests and her in petticuts and thro't bandages for ten years, and I'm not going to begin to waste the minute she's under ground. She would say, "you go on wearin' them vests!" and I'm goin' to.'

"'She wouldn't!' said the other. 'She'd say, "you go on wearin' the coat and pants, but if you are in mournin' for me, show it by puttin' on a black vest, as is no more than decent."'

"'I can mourn just as well in red flannel as what I can in black!' says the first one.

"'You can't!' says the other.

"'I'll show you whether I can or not!' says the first.

"And at that they turned face to face to each other and sideways to me, and each

riz up his right arm — honest, Mr. Parks, I couldn't believe but 'twas the same person and him reflected in a mirror, they was so like. I thought they was goin' to strike each other, so I stepped forward and said, 'Good mornin', Cousins; I've come!'"

Again she tinkled a laugh. "You never see men more surprised than what they was; but they shook hands real pleasant, made me welcome, and then walked one off one way and one the other, and so it has remained. At first they wanted to eat in different rooms, but I told 'em I couldn't have that, nor yet I couldn't have no quarrellin', so now we get on real pleasant, as you see. But isn't it comical? There! when I see them —"

At this moment a prolonged cough was heard from the direction of the sitting-room; and at the same time a thin high voice called, "Calvin! you got lost, or what?"

"Cousins are gettin' uneasy!" said Mary

Sands. " You'd best go in, Mr. Parks, and I'm a thousand times obliged to you for helpin' me with the dishes. You are an elegant washer, I must say."

" Miss Hands," replied Calvin Parks as he drew on his coat, " the man who wouldn't wash good to such wipin' as yours wouldn't deserve to eat out of a dish. The thanks is on my side for enjoyin' the privilege."

CHAPTER III

CALVIN'S STORY

PASSING from the kitchen into the back sitting-room, Calvin found Mr. Sim hunched in his chair, looking injured.

"I didn't know but you had gone without comin' in," he said; "seems to me you've ben a long time with them dishes."

"They're handsome dishes!" replied Calvin. "You wouldn't have me hurry and risk droppin' of them, would you? Well, Sim, I s'pose I must be joggin' along."

"What's your hurry? what's your hurry?" cried Mr. Sim peevishly. "I didn't have no chance to talk at dinner, there was so much clack goin' on;" and he cast a baleful glance at the doorway. "I want to know where you've ben and what you've ben doin' all these years, Calvin. Sit down

and fill your pipe, and let's hear about it."

Calvin looked about him. "Well!" he said slowly, "I don't know as there's any such drivin' hurry. Hossy'll be pleased to stay a bit longer, I reckon;" he glanced out of the window at the fat brown horse, who was munching oats sleepily.

"Want to hear where I've been, do you, Sim? All right! Where shall I set? Sam'll want to hear too, won't he?"

"Yes!" cried Mr. Sam from the other room. "Certin' I do, Calvin, certin' I do."

"Well, how about this? Come on into the front room, Sim!"

"No! no!" cried Mr. Sim hastily. "I allus set here, Calvin. You might set in the doorway," he added, "then the other one could hear too."

"Well, of all the darned foolishness ever I heard of!" said Calvin Parks. "Say, boys, how old was you last birthday? Was

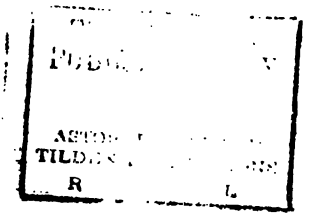
it fifty, or only five? Mebbe I was mistaken!"

Standing in the doorway, which he seemed to fill with his stalwart sunburnt presence, he looked from one twin to the other, half amused, half indignant. The brothers shuffled their feet and wriggled in their chairs. Their motions were identical, and the furtive glance which Mr. Sam cast at Calvin was mirrored by Mr. Sim. "I can hear fust rate if you sit there, Cal!" said both brothers together.

Calvin Parks pulled a chair into the doorway, and tilted it at a convenient angle. Again he looked from one twin to the other.

"If your Ma was here —" he said slowly; "but there! She ain't, and that's all there is to it. Well, I'm here anyhow, ain't I? and you want to know how I come here. Well, I come behind hossy. Whose hossy? My hossy, and my waggin. Good enough

"HE LOOKED FROM ONE TWIN TO THE OTHER, HALF AMUSED, HALF INDIGNANT."



hossy, good enough waggin; but defend me from that way of gettin' about! Land is good to live on: take a farm like this now; I admire it, and barrin' tomfoolishness, I call you two lucky fellows; but come to gettin' about, give me water. This rumblin' and joltin' about over clay ro'ds, and climbin' in and out over a great wheel, and like as not hossy startin' up just as you've got your leg over and throwin' of you into the ro'd — what I say is, darn it all! And think you might be slippin' along in a schooner, and the water lip-lappin', and the shore slidin' by smooth and pleasant, and no need to say 'gerlong up!' nor slap the reins nor feed her oats — I tell you, boys, I get so homesick for it I think some days I'll chuck the whole concern."

"What concern?" inquired Mr. Sam. "You appear to me to ramble in your talk, Calvin, same as you allus did. Ma allus said you was a rambler in your talk and a

rover in your ways, and you'd never settle down till you married."

"She did, did she?" said Calvin musing. "I expect she was about right. Well — you see," he cast an apologetic glance at Mary Sands, who had come in quietly and sat down with her sewing in the front room, "I've always laid it to some to the fire. Look at your house here, boys!" he gave a wistful glance round the two bright, tidy, cheerful rooms. "If I had a home like this, would I be a rover? I guess not! I guess I shouldn't need no cobbler's wax on the seat of the chair to hold me down; but if all you had come home to was an empty cellar hole, not a stick nor a stitch — nothing was saved, you remember, — why, you might feel different. I took to the coastin' trade, as you know, and the past ten years I've been master of the 'Mary Sands, Bath and Floridy with lumber.'"

"I want to know!" said Mr. Sam.

"Do tell me!" cried Mr. Sim. "Why —"

Mary Sands had dropped her work at the sound of her own name, and looked up quickly; meeting Calvin Parks's look of unconscious admiration, the wholesome color flushed into her face again, and her brown eyes began to twinkle. She broke in quickly on Mr. Sim's slow speech.

"Was she a good vessel, Mr. Parks? You know I told you I was owner of a schooner, and so I take an interest in vessels, especially coasters."

"If I should say that she was as fine-lookin' a vessel as you was lady," said Calvin deliberately, "you might cast it up that I was makin' personal remarks, which far be it from me to do; but I will say that she is a sweet schooner. There ain't a line of her but what is clean cut and handsome to look at. And as for her disposition! there! I've knowed vessels as was good-lookin', and yet so contrary and

cantankerous that you'd rather lay down and take a lickin' than sail in them, any day. I've knowed poor-spirited vessels, and vessels that was just ornery and mean; but 't is handsome is as handsome does with the Mary Sands. She's sweet as her looks; she's capable and she willin'; she's free and yet she's steady. If your Ma was here, Sim and Samuel, I'd say to her, ' Show me the Mary Sands in petticoats and if she was agreeable I'd never need to be called rover again."

" Why," began Mr. Sim again; but again his cousin cut him short with less than her usual courtesy. " She must be a picture of a vessel, surely, Mr. Parks. And how come you to leave, if you liked the life so well? I'm sure Cousins want to hear about that, and I should be pleased too."

Calvin pulled at his pipe in silence for several minutes.

" 'Tis hard to explain," he said at last.

" I don't know as I can make it clear to you, Miss Hands; but it's a fact that a seaman, and especially a coastwise seaman, now and then takes a hankerin' after the land. Deep-sea voyages, you just don't think about it, and 'twouldn't make no difference if you did. But slippin' along shore, seein' handsome prospects, you know, and hills risin' up and ro'ds climbin' over them and goin' somewhere, you don't know where — and now and then a village, and mebbe hear the church bells ringin' and you forgettin' 'twas Sunday — now and then, some ways, it gets a holt of you.

" Well, it's goin' on a year now that one of them spells come over me. I rec'lect well, 'twas a hot day in August. We was becalmed off the mouth of the river, and the Mary couldn't make no headway, 'peared as though. The crew stuck their jackknives into the mainmast, and whistled all they knew for a wind; and I set there

and watched the sails playin' Isick and Josh, Isick and Josh, till, honest, I could feel the soul creakin' inside me with tiredness. I expect the sun kind o' scrambled my brains, same as a dish of eggs; for bumbye a tug come along, goin' to the city, and I wasted good money by gettin' a tow and pullin' into port two days ahead of schedule time. Now see what I got for it! I went to the office, and there was a letter from a lawyer sayin' my owner was dead and had left the schooner to his niece. I didn't read no further, and to this day I don't know what the woman's name is. I set down and took up the paper; at first I was too mad to read. I don't know just what I was mad at, neither, but so it was. Pretty soon my eye fell on a notice of a candy route for sale, hoss and waggin', good-will and fixtures, the whole concern. 'That's me!' I says. 'No woman in mine!'

"I'm showing you what an incapable pumpkin-head I was, Miss Hands, so you can see I ain't keepin' nothin' back. All about it, I sent my papers to the lawyer that night, and next day I bought the candy route and the hoss and waggin! All the candies, lozenges, and peppermint drops; tutti-frutti and pepsin chewin'-gum; peanut toffy and purity kisses; wholesale and retail, Calvin Parks agent, that's me!"

He brought his chair down on four legs and towered once more in the doorway. "There's the first chapter of my orter-biography, Miss Hands and boys," he said. "I must be off now, or I sha'n't get over my route today."

CHAPTER IV

THE CANDY ROUTE

"Hossy," said Calvin as he drove out of the yard, "what do you think of that young woman?"

(Mary Sands was nearer forty than thirty, but she will be young at seventy.) The brown horse shook his head slightly as Calvin flicked the whip past his ear.

"Well, there you're mistaken!" said Calvin. "There's where you show your ignorance, hossy. I tell you that young woman is A 1 and clipper built if ever I see such. Yes, sir! ship-shape and Bristol fashion, live-oak frame, and copper fasten-in's, is what I call Miss Hands, and a singular name she's got. Most prob'ly she'll be changin' it to Sill one of these days, and one of them two lobsters will be a darned

"CALVIN REGARDED THEM BENEVOLENTLY."

ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R L

lucky feller. I wonder which she'll take. I wonder why in Tunkett she should want either one of 'em. I wonder — hello!"

He checked the brown horse. A small boy was standing on a gate-post and shouting vigorously.

"What say, sonny?" said Calvin.

"Be you the candy man?" cried the child.

"That's what! be you the candy boy? lozenges, tutti-frutti and pepsin chewin' gum, chocolate creams, stick candy — what'll you have, young feller?"

"I want a stick of checkerberry!" said the boy.

"So do I!" cried a little girl in a pink gingham frock, who had run out from the house and climbed on the other gate-post. She was a pretty curly little creature, and the boy was an engaging compound of flaxen hair, freckles and snub nose. Calvin regarded them benevolently, and pulled out a drawer under the seat of the wagon.

"Here you are!" he said, taking out a glass jar full of enchanting red and white sticks.

"Best checkerberry in the State of Maine; cent apiece!" and he held out two sticks.

The children's eyes grew big and tragic. "We ain't got any money!" said the boy, sadly.

"Not *any* money!" echoed the little girl.

"Then what in time did you ask for it for?" asked Calvin rather irritably.

"I didn't!" said the boy. "I just said I wanted it."

Calvin looked from him to the girl, and and then at the candy, helplessly.

"Well, look here!" he said. "Say! where do hossy and me come in? We've got to get our livin', you see."

"Could you get much living out of two sticks?" asked the little girl.

Calvin looked again at the round wistful eyes.

"This ain't no kind of way to do business!" he remonstrated. "You've got to airn it some way, you know. Tell you what! Let me see which can holler loudest, and I'll give you a stick apiece."

The babes closed their eyes, threw back their heads, and bellowed to the skies.

"That's first rate!" said Calvin. "Good lung power there, young uns! go it again!"

The children roared like infant bulls of Bashan. At this moment the door of the house flew open and a woman appeared wild-eyed.

"What's the matter?" she cried. "Susy, be you hurt? Eben, has something bit you?"

"Don't you be scairt, Marm!" said Calvin affably. "They was just showin' off their lung power, and they've got a first rate article of it."

The woman's eyes flashed, and she hurried toward the gate. "You come along and be spanked!" she cried to the children; "scarin' me into palpitations, and your Aunt Mandy layin' in a blue ager! And as for you," she addressed Calvin directly, "the best thing you can do is to get out of this the quickest you know how. When I want peddlers round here I'll let you know."

The children were hurried into the house, shrieking now in good earnest, but clutching their candy sticks. Calvin gazed after them ruefully.

"Well, hossy, that didn't seem to work real good, did it?" he said. "Fact is, we ain't got the hang of this business, no way, shape or manner. Try to please the kids and you get 'em a spankin' instead. Well, they got their candy anyway. 'Pears as if their Ma needed somethin', howsomever."

He sat pondering with his eyes fixed anxiously on the house; finally he rummaged

among his drawers, and taking out a small package, he climbed laboriously out over the wheel, and making his way up to the house, knocked at the door. The woman opened it with a bounce, and snorted when she saw him.

Calvin bent toward her confidentially, his face full of serious anxiety.

"Say, lady!" he said gravely; "I'd like to make you a present of these cardamom seeds. They do say they're the best thing goin' for the temper; kind o' counter-irritant, y' know; bite the tongue, and —"

The door banged in his face. He smiled placidly, and returning to his wagon clambered in again and chirruped cheerily to the brown horse.

"Gitty up, hossy!" he said. "I feel a sight better now. Gitty up!"

They jogged on for some time, Calvin mostly silent, though now and then he broke out into song.

"Now Renzo was a sailor;
That's what Renzo was, tiddy hi!
He surely warn't a tailor,
So haul the bowline, haul!
He went adrift in Casco Bay,
Mate to a mud-scow haulin' hay,
And he come home late for his weddin' day,
So haul the bowline, haul!"

Rounding a curve in the road, he saw a man walking in the same direction in which he was going; a young man, slight and wiry, walking with quick, jerky strides. Calvin observed him.

"That young feller's in a hurry, hossy," he said. "See him? he's takin' longer steps than what his legs are, and that's agin' natur'. What say about givin' him a lift, hey?"

The brown horse, his ear being flicked, shook his head decidedly. "Sho!" said Calvin, "you don't mean that, hossy. Your bark — well, not exactly bark — is worse than your — not precisely bite, but

you know what I mean. He's in a hurry, and he's in trouble too, and you and me ain't neither one nor 'tother. Say!" he called as he came within hailing distance. "Want a lift?"

The man stopped with a start, and turned a pale face on Calvin. He had red hair, and his blue eyes burned angrily.

"Yes!" he said. Calvin stopped, and he jumped quickly into the wagon. Calvin looked at him expectantly a moment; then "Much obliged!" he said. "Real accommodatin' of you!"

The young man colored like a girl. "I beg your pardon!" he said. "I'm forgetting my manners and everything else, I guess. Much obliged to you for takin' me up. I'm in a terrible hurry!" he added, looking doubtfully at the brown horse, who was jogging peacefully along.

"Four legs is better than two!" said Calvin. "Gitty up, hossy! He makes better

time than what he appears to, hossy does. He's a better ro'der than you be. We'll git there!"

"How far you goin'?" asked the man.

"Oh, down along a piece!" said Calvin. "Where be you?"

"I'm going to Tinkham," said the red-haired man with angry emphasis; "to Lawyer Filcher. If there was any lawyer nearer I'd go to him."

"I want to know!" said Calvin sociably. "Insurance?"

"No!" the man broke out. "I'm goin' to get a bill!"

Now in our part of the country a "bill" means a bill of divorce. Calvin shook his head with sympathetic interest.

"Sho!" he said. "A young feller like you? now ain't that a pity?"

"I can't stand it any longer!" the lad cried, and his hands worked with passion. "Nor yet I won't, I tell you. No man

would. This ends it. We was mismated from the first, and this is the last."

"Well!" said Calvin. "Ain't that a pity now? If it's so, it's so, and mebbe a bill is the best thing. Awful homely, is she?"

The lad turned upon him, and his blue eyes flashed.

"Homely?" he said roughly. "What you talkin' about? she was Katie Hazard."

"Nice name!" said Calvin. "Come from these parts?"

"I guess you don't!" retorted the lad, "or you wouldn't have to be told. She was called the prettiest girl in the county when I married her, and she hasn't got over it yet."

"You don't say!" said Calvin placidly. "Well, good looks is pleasant, I always maintain; I'd full rather have a woman good-lookin' if other things is 'cordin' to.

I suppose likely she's a poor cook? A man has to have his victuals, you know!"

"She's the best cook in the State!" said the young man doggedly. "I'd back her riz bread or doughnuts or pies against any woman's from Portland to 'Roostick."

"Quite a ways," said Calvin. "S'pose likely she's slack, hey? house cluttered up? calicker wrapper and shoes down at the heel? that kind?"

The blue eyes flared at him. "I don't want none o' this kind o' talk!" he said sharply. "Slack! I'd sooner eat off Katie's kitchen floor than any other woman's parlor table that ever I see. You find me a speck o' dust or a spot o' dirt round our house and I'll find you a blue hen."

"I see!" said Calvin. "Another fellow, is there?"

"No!" shouted the young man, and he turned savagely on Calvin. "I'd like to know why you're sayin' this kind of thing,

when you never see nor heard of me nor my wife before."

"Well!" said Calvin comfortably. "I've been wonderin' ever since you got in whether you was an ill-used man or a darned fool, and now I've found out. Why, you loony, if you've got a wife like all that, why in Tunkett are you goin' to get a bill?"

His voice rang out like a ship's trumpet. The lad shrunk down in his seat, and his face grew dogged and set.

"We was mismated, I tell you!" he said. "She's got a temper!"

"Well, how about you?" asked Calvin. "You ain't got that red hair for nothin', son."

"I know! I have one too," the lad admitted; "and each one stirs the other up and makes it worse. It's no use, I tell you! We get jawin' and the house won't hold us both, so I'm going to clear out."

"Sho!" said Calvin.

They were silent for a few moments, the young husband brooding over his wrongs, Calvin meditating. At last he said slowly, "Young feller, I ain't no lawyer, nor yet wishful to be; but I expect I can cure your case."

"What do you mean?" asked the lad.

"I expect I can cure your case," Calvin repeated deliberately, "for less money by a good sight, and more agreeable all round. Lemme see! two and two is four, and seven times four is twenty-eight, and two more — yes, sir! I'll undertake to cure your case for thirty cents, and do it handsome."

He opened a drawer, and after a careful inspection took out two small objects which he held up. "See them?" he said. "This is your article. All Day Suckers, they're called, and well named. The candy fills the mouth and yet don't crowd it any; the stick is to hold on by, and take it out when necessary. Pure sugar, no glucose in it;

not a mite! Pure sugar, cream o' tartar killed, and flavored with fruit surrup. Now, young feller, you take fourteen of them suckers. They're two cents apiece, that's two for every day in the week. Every time you two find you're beginnin' to jaw, in goes your sucker, and you keep it there till you feel pleasant again. Keep that up for a week, and finish up at the end with a Purity Kiss — fifteen cents a dozen, call it two cents apiece, and I'll lay my next lo'd — what's that?"

A sharp rattle was heard. Both men turned round, and saw a light wagon whirling toward them. The horse was galloping; the driver, a young woman in a cloud of red gold hair, was urging him on with whip and voice.

"Well!" said Calvin Parks.

"Great hemlock!" cried the young man. "Katie, stop!" He leaped out over the wheel, and set off running toward the ad-

vancing wagon. The young woman pulled up with a jerk.

"Joe!" she cried. "Oh, Joe! come back! I — I'm sorry I bit you!"

She jumped out — over the wheel too — and the two red heads flamed together.

Calvin gazed for a moment, then turned round with a smile.

"I guess they won't need them suckers after all!" he said. "Gitty up, hossy!"

CHAPTER V

CONCERNING PEPPERMINTS

MARY SANDS stood in the doorway, leaning on her broom and looking out over the pleasant autumn country. It was a golden morning, and the world shone and sparkled in quite a wonderful way.

The green dooryard had its special show of emeralds, set off here and there by a tuft of dandelion that had escaped the watchful eye of Mr. Sam. The stone wall of the barnyard was almost hidden by the hollyhocks; they were a pretty sight, Mary thought; she did admire hollyhocks.

The vast dog, who had been lying on the doorstep, rose slowly, shook himself elaborately, pricked his ears, and looked down the road.

"What is it, Rover?" asked Mary

Sands. "Do you feel good this mornin', same as I do? What you lookin' at? Somebody comin' along the road? So there is! It can't be Cousin Sam back again; he hasn't been gone but an hour. Why — can it — it surely is Mr. Parks!"

Involuntarily her hand went up to the smooth ripples of her brown hair; unconsciously she glanced down at her fresh print dress and blue apron.

"I wish't I'd had me a white apron!" she said. "But there! he'll have to take me as he finds me. Workin' time ain't perkin' time, as Gran'm'ther used to say. Good mornin', Mr. Parks! isn't this a pretty day?"

"Good mornin' to you, Miss Hands!" said Calvin Parks as he drove up to the door. "It is a pretty day, and everything to match, far as I can see. And the prettiest thing I've seen this mornin' is you," he added, but not aloud.

"I was lookin' at them hollyhocks," said Mary. "See 'em down by the wall yonder? Ain't they handsome? Them pink and white ones look to me like girls, slim young ones all ready to bob a curtsey. I don't know but you'll think it foolish, but I'm always seein' likenesses between flowers and folks."

"Be you?" said Calvin. "That's a pretty idee now. I believe women folks have pretty idees right along; it must be real agreeable. Now when I see a hollyhock there ain't nothin' to it but hollyhock — except the cheese!" he added meditatively. "I used to think a sight of hollyhock cheese when I was a youngster."

"So did I!" cried Mary with her tinkling laugh. "But aren't you comin' in, Mr. Parks? Do light down! Cousin Sam's gone to market, but Cousin Sim'll be real pleased to see you. He's been feelin' slim for two or three days."

"That so?" said Calvin. "Well, I

didn't know as I should stop, more'n just to pass the time o' day, but if he's feelin' slim — " he threw the reins on the horse's neck and clambered out of the wagon.

" Hossy'll be glad to rest a spell, won't you, hossy? "

" He looks real clever! " said Mary. " I should think he'd be pleasant to ride behind."

" You try it some day and see! " said Calvin. " He's the cleverest horse on the ro'd, and the cutest. What do you think he did yesterday? Now I don't know as you'll believe me when I tell you, but it's a fact. I was in at the store down at the Corners, havin' some truck with Si Turner, and there come along a boy as wasn't any more honest than he had to be, and he thought 'twould be smart to reach in over the wheel and help himself to candy out of the drawers. Well, mebbe 'twas smart; but hossy was smarter, for he reached round

his head and c'ot him by the seat of his pants — Jerusalem! if you'll excuse the expression, Miss Hands, how that feller did holler! Me and Si come hikin' out, thought he was killed and got the hives besides; when we see what was up, we sot down and laughed till, honest, we had to lean against one another or we'd rolled over an' over on the ground. Hossy held on like a good 'un till I told him to let go, and then he dropped the pants and went to work eatin' grass as if nothin' had been goin' on at all."

"Did you ever?" cried Mary Sands. "I never knew a hoss could have that much sense, Mr. Parks. Why, 'twas like a person more than a dumb critter."

"There's critters and critters!" said Calvin Parks. "Hossy's a prize package, that's a fact. Want a bite, hossy? tain't dinner time yet, but a bite won't hurt you."

He took a nose-bag from the wagon and

hung it over the brown horse's head. The horse, who had gone to sleep as soon as he stopped, opened one eye, blinked at his master, and shut it again.

"Oh, all right!" said Calvin. "Any time; suit yourself! Only I can't wag your jaws for ye, ye know."

Mary had turned to enter the house, saying something about telling Cousin he was coming.

"Oh! wait just a minute, Miss Hands!" Calvin called. "I took the liberty —" he rummaged among his drawers, and finally brought out a small parcel.

"I dono — most prob'ly it ain't just what you'd like. I couldn't tell what flavor you'd prefer, and I always think myself that pep'mint is the wholesomest —"

Amazed and embarrassed at finding himself embarrassed, Calvin paused awkwardly, holding the box of peppermints in his hand; but when he saw Mary Sands blushing

in the delightful red and brown way she had, and caught the twinkle in her eye, he was suddenly at ease again.

"You try 'em!" he said simply, and gave her the box.

"Why, Mr. Parks!" cried Mary. "You don't mean to say you brought these for me? Well, you are more than kind, I must say. Why, they're deleecious! There's nothing like pep'mint to my taste; now this is surely a treat. I'm a thousand times obliged to you, Mr. Parks. These don't taste like boughten candy; there's a real kind of home-made flavor to 'em."

"That's right!" said Calvin. "That's just it; they are home-made. Them pep'-mints is made by an old gentleman in East Cyrus. I lighted on 'em by accident, as you might say, and 'twas a good job I did."

"How was that?" Mary inquired civilly.

"Why, I ain't greatly acquainted in these parts, you know, Miss Hands; been away

so much, you understand, and never was one to go much when I was to home, only amongst the near neighbors. I dono as ever I was in East Cyrus before. 'Tis a pleasant-lookin' place. Nice street; not many stores, but what there was was ship-shape and Bristol fashion; folks personable and well-appearin'; I was pleased with East Cyrus. I druv along kind o' slow, lookin' for my kind of a place; sure enough, I come to a little store with candy in the window. Hossy saw it too, and stopped of his own accord.

"'That so?' says I. 'Friend of yours, hossy?' He nods his head real sociable, hossy doos, and I was just goin' to ramble down out of that squirrel-cage, when the door opens kind o' smart, and someone hollers out, 'I don't want any! You can go right along!'

"'Can!' says I. 'Now that's real accommodatin' of you. Anywheres special

you'd like me to go? That's what I come to inquire about,' I says.

"He was a little man, kind o' dried up, but yet smart-lookin', and he *was* smart. He looks at hossy. 'You can go to Thunder!' he says.

"'First turn to the right, or second to the left?' says I. Then he looks at me. 'Hello!' he says; 'it ain't you!'

"'No,' I says; 'it ain't. It's my half-uncle's widder from out west,' I says.

"He kind o' laughed. 'What are you doin' with his hoss, then?' says he.

"'I bought it off'n him,' says I; 'it's my hoss now, and my team. Like to know how many teeth we've got between us?'

"'Well, all the same I don't want any!' he says; and he starts to go back into the store.

"'Excuse *me*!' I says, as polite as I knew how. 'Would you have any objections to namin' over the things you don't

want? I didn't know as I'd offered you anything, but mebbe I done it in my sleep.'

"'Glucose is one thing,' he says. 'Terry alba, coal-tar, plaster-of-Paris; them's some of the things I don't want. And you're another. Is that enough?'

"'Not quite,' I says. 'Go slow, shipmate! If you wanted them things the wust way in the world you couldn't get 'em off'n me, 'cause I ain't got 'em."

"He grunted. 'Tell that to the monkey!' he says.

"'I am,' I says, 'or the nearest I can see to one.'

"'He always had 'em,' he says, 'and tried to sell 'em to me every time he come by.'

"'I know!' says I. 'I found 'em in the stock, and I sot 'em on the fire and seen 'em burn. Gitty up, hossy!' I says. 'We'll go on and see if there's any place in this village where they keep manners,'

I says, 'and we'll send this old gentleman a half a pound to stock up with!' I says.

"'Hold on!' he says. 'I spoke too quick. Come in and we'll talk.'

"So I went. Had half a mind not to, but 'twan't the sensible half. I tell you, I had a real pleasant time, Miss Hands. Come to get him smoothed down and combed out, and he was as pleasant an old gentleman as ever I see. But he was an old-fashioned candy-maker, you see, and he didn't like these new-fangled ways any more than what I do. Never had a pound of glucose on his premises, nor never will; nothin' but pure sugar. We had a real good time together; and he gave me them pep'mints, and I'm goin' to have 'em reg'lar every week. He's got a little kitchen in back there that's a perfect pictur' to look at. I'd like to have you see it, Miss Hands, honest I would."

At this moment a loud and peevish crow was heard from the house.

"There!" said Mary Sands. "We must be goin' in, Mr. Parks. Cousin's gettin' impatient, I expect."

They found Mr. Sim fairly spluttering with impatience.

"What — what — what — " he began as they entered; "I didn't know as you was ever comin', Cousin. I'd oughter have had my med'cine — that you, Cal? — half an hour ago; set down, won't you? half a glass, with sugar and hot water! pretty well, be ye? I'm most choked to death, settin' here waitin'."

"There, Cousin!" said Mary Sands in her mellow, soothing voice. "I'll get you the medicine right away; though if the truth was told I expect you'd be better off without it. I don't hold with all this dosin', do you, Mr. Parks?"

"I do not!" said Calvin Parks. "Looks

to me as if all the doses he'd been takin' for a week was havin' it out inside him, and no two agreein'. Say, Sim! s'pose you let Miss Hands throw away all that stuff, and take a pep'mint instead."

CHAPTER VI

BOARD AND LODGING

"TAKE a seat, Mr. Parks!" said Mary Sands, hospitably. "Talk of angels! Cousins and I were just speakin' of you, and sayin' you never told us the rest of that nice story you began the first time you was here."

"What story?" asked Calvin Parks.

"Why, your own story, to be sure. You told us how you was displeased at a woman's bein' owner of your schooner, —" her eyes twinkled mischievously, —"and how you come ashore and set up your candy route; but Cousins were just sayin' they didn't know where you lived, nor how you was fixed anyways, except that you had that nice hoss and waggin."

"That so?" said Calvin, musing. "Well,

I don't know as there's any particklar story to the rest on't. I drive my route, you know; quite a ways it is; takes me about a week to git round it all. 'Tis pleasant doin's for the most part, only when it comes to gettin' in and out of this shay; that gits me every time. But I see the country, you know — pretty country it is; I never see a prettier, — and meet up with folks and all, — "

"Where do you reside?" inquired Mr. Sam. He had moved his chair near the door of Mr. Sim's sitting-room, where Calvin was, and now peered round the door-jamb, his body invisible, his little wizen face appearing as if hung in air.

"Great snakes, Sam!" exclaimed Calvin Parks. "Don't scare the life out of us. Where's the rest of you? No use your pretendin' to be one of them cherub articles, 'cause you don't look it, and don't let anyone deceive you into thinkin' you do. I live —

if you call it livin', — down Tinkham way, about ten miles from here. I'm boardin' with Widder Marlin and her daughter. Ever hear of Phrony Marlin? Well, she's a case, Phrony is, and the old lady's another. Widder of a sea-cap'n that I sailed with in former days. She has a little home, and she lets me have a room. I don't know as the old lady is quite right in her mind — I don't know as either one of 'em is, come to think of it; and she ain't much of a cook; but as she says, it's only suppers and breakfasts, and it's all dust and ashes anyway. It ain't worth while to make trouble, and I git on first-rate."

"I'm afraid they don't make you real comfortable, Mr. Parks!" said Mary Sands. "I should think they might; I don't believe but what you do your part and more too."

"Well, I dono!" said Calvin simply. "I try to help out, split the wood, kerry water and like that; two lone women, ye

know, no man belongin' to 'em; I wouldn't wish to let 'em feel forsaken any."

"Do they give you enough to eat?" inquired Mr. Sim.

"Oh, I guess so. They don't feed me any too high, but they don't live any higher themselves. Phrony has the dyspepsy — I dono as it's surprisin' that she should — and the old lady has an idee that eatin' is a snare of the evil one, and she gits along on next door after nothin', as you may say."

"The idea!" cried Mary Sands, indignantly. "Mr. Parks, why do you stay there? I wouldn't if I was you, not another day."

"Oh! they don't mean no harm," said Calvin; "not a mite. I git on first-rate so long as they do; it's only when they get to quarrellin' that I mind. When they fall afoul of each other, it ain't real agreeable; but there's where it comes in handy bein'

a man. Hossy and me can git out from under foot most times, and leave 'em to train by themselves."

He paused, and shook his head with a reminiscent chuckle.

"Last week we had us quite a time!" he said. "Phrony got some kind of a bee in her bunnet — I dono what it was! seemed to have a kind of idee that she was goin' to git married, if only she had some money. I never see no man round the house, nor yet heard none speak of her; and, too, if she'd looked in the glass she'd have seen 'twarn't real reasonable to expect it. However it was, so it was; she's got her eye on somebody, no question about that. Well, it's a small farm, and the soil ain't any too rich; they git along, but no more than, I expect; and yet they don't spend a cent more'n they have to, you may resk your eye-teeth on that. Well, anyways, here's what happened. I come in one night, and

the old lady was sittin' studyin' over a letter or like that. When she saw me, 'Cap'n,' she says (always calls me Cap'n, same as she did the old man), 'will you cast your eye over that,' she says, 'and tell me what you think of it?'

"I looked it over, and you may call me a horn-pout, Miss Hands and boys, if 'twarn't a bill from Phrony, drawed up in reg'lar style, chargin' her mother three dollars a week wages for thirty years. Now, Miss Hands, I'd like to know what you think of that."

"I think 'twas scandalous!" cried Mary Sands, emphatically. "I think she ought to be ashamed of herself. The idea!"

"Well, it didn't seem to me real suitable," said Calvin; "I couldn't *make* it seem so, and so I said. 'What's got into her?' I said. 'You and her belong together; and what's one's is 'tother's, ain't it, so far as livin' goes?'

"The old lady looks at me kind o' queer. 'Phrony ain't satisfied,' she says. 'She thinks the Lord designs her to be a helpmeet, and that He's manifestin' Himself at present, or liable so to do.'

"Well, I studied over that a bit, but I didn't make nothin' out of it. The old lady has spells, as I told you, when she ain't just right in her head. Makes me laugh sometimes, the things she'll say. Take last night, now! I didn't have no fork, and I asked her to please give me one. Honest, if she didn't take and bring me a spoon! 'There, Cap'n!' she says. 'It don't look like a fork,' she says, 'but I dono what's the matter with it. The Lord'll provide!' she says. 'It's all dust and ashes!' Other days, she'll be as wide awake as the next one, and talk straight as a string. Well, about the bill! I told her she'd better let it go, and Phrony'd come round and see she wa'n't actin' real sen-

sible, nor yet pretty. But not she! Next mornin' before I left she come out to the barn and showed me another paper, and — Jerusalem crickets! if it warn't a bill against Phrony for board and lodgin' for forty-seven years! Haw! haw! That's where the old lady come out on top. There warn't no bee in *her* bunnet that time!"

"He! he!" cackled Mr. Sim.

"Ho! ho!" piped Mr. Sam.

But Mary Sands looked troubled. "Mr. Parks," she said; "you'll excuse me, as am little more than a stranger to you; but yet I can't help but say I do wish you was in a different kind of place. There must be lots of nice places where you would be more than welcome."

"Mebbe so, and mebbe son't!" said Calvin Parks placidly. "Folks is real friendly, all along the route. Yes, come to think of it, there's several has said they would be pleased to take me in for a spell,

if I should be thinkin' of a change. But old Widder Marlin, she needs the board money, and — well, here's where it is, Miss Hands; I don't know as she'd be real likely to get another boarder. I knew the Cap'n, you see, and he was always good to me aboard ship. But I'm full as much obliged to you," he added, with a very friendly look in his brown eyes, " for givin' it a thought. Bless your heart, this old carcass don't need much attention; it gets all it deserves, I presume likely, and more too.

" Well, I must be ramblin' along, I guess. I promised to pick up Miss Phrony at the Corners. She's been visitin' there to-day, and she'll think I'm lost for good. I tell you what it is, though, Miss Hands and boys; it's easier to turn in at this gate than what it is to turn out again, and I expect I shall be comin' in real often, if no objection is made."

" So do, Calvin! so do!" cried both

twins together. Calvin looked at Mary Sands, and her eyes were as friendly as his own. " The oftener you come, Mr. Parks," she said, " the better I shall be pleased, for certin."

" Gitty up, hossy ! " said Calvin. " We're late for supper now, and it don't do for me to get too sharp-set; there ain't likely to be more supper than what I can get away with. There's the store now, and there's Miss Phrony, sure enough, lookin' out for me. Now I put it to you, hossy; what was the object, precisely, of makin' a woman look like that? The ways is mysterious, sure enough. There's a plenty of material there for a good-lookin' woman, take and spread it kind o' different."

A tall, scraggy woman, with pale green eyes seeking each other across a formidable beak, and teeth like a twisted balustrade,

greeted him with a reproachful look as he drove up to the corner store.

"Good afternoon, Miss Phrony," he said comfortably. "I expect I'm just a mite late, ain't I?"

"I should think you was!" replied the scraggy woman. "I've been waitin' full two hours, Cap'n Parks."

"Have!" said Calvin affably. "Now ain't that a sight! But it's a good thing you had such pleasant company to wait in; I'm glad of that. How do, Si? how do, Eph?" he nodded to two men who were leaning against the door-posts, chewing straws and observing the universe. "Any trade doin' with little Calvin to-day?"

"Nothin' only a box of wintergreen lozenges, I guess," said Si, the storekeeper. "Mebbe you might leave another box of broken," he added, after a glance in at his showcase. "Trade hasn't been real smart this week. You ain't goin' to charge

me full price for them goods, are you, Cal?"

"If I took off anything," replied Calvin, "'twould be because you were so handsome, and that wouldn't be real good for your disposition, so I expect I shall have to deny myself the pleasure. Three dollars and ninety cents — thank you, sir! Now, Miss Phrony, if you're ready — these your bundles? Why, you've been buyin' out the store, I expect! Let me help you in; up she comes! So long, boys!"

"Think she'll get him?" said Si to Eph, as they watched the wagon disappearing down the road.

"I — don't — know!" replied Si slowly. "Sometimes I think he's as simple as he is appearin', and then again I have my doubts. But one thing's sure; she's goin' to do her darndest towards it!"

CHAPTER VII

MATCH-MAKING

"CAL!" said Mr. Sim.

"Wall!" said Calvin Parks. "That's poetry, Sim, or as nigh to it as you and me are likely to come."

"Quit foolin', Cal! I want to speak to you serious."

"Fire away!" said Calvin, leaning back in his chair and stretching his long legs.

"I want to know what you think of Cousin!" Mr. Sim went on.

Calvin sat up, and drew in his legs.

"She's all right!" he said shortly.

"Of course she's all right!" said Mr. Sim peevishly. "She wouldn't be here if she was all wrong, would she? I want to know what you *think* of her."

"I think she's a fine-appearin' woman!"

said Calvin slowly. "And smart. And personable. A 1, clipper-built and copper-fastened, is the way I should describe your cousin if she was a vessel."

"You're right, Cal; you're right!" said Mr. Sim. "She's all that and more. She's agreeable, and she's capable, and she's savin', Calvin; savin'. Ma allers said, 'If the time comes when you *have* to marry, marry a saver!' she'd say."

Calvin said nothing. He felt the honest middle-aged blood mounting in his cheeks, but reflected comfortably that it would not show through the brown.

"Now, Cal," Mr. Sim went on; "a woman like that ain't goin' through life single."

"You bet she ain't!" said Calvin briefly; "you darned old weasel!" he added, but not aloud.

"She ain't no more than forty, and she don't look that. She's well fixed, too; she

ain't no need to work, Cousin ain't; she come here to accommodate, you understand."

"I understand!" said Calvin; "you blamed old ferret!" Calvin was fond of finishing his sentences in silence.

"Now what I say is, —" and Mr. Sim leaned forward, and sank his voice to a whisper, — "What I say is, that woman ought not to go out of the family, Calvin Parks!"

Calvin grunted. A grunt may mean anything, and Mr. Sim took it for assent.

"Jes' so! That's what I'm sayin'. I knew you'd see it that way. Now, Calvin, I want you to help us."

A spark came into Calvin's brown eyes. "Help you!" he repeated. "What's the matter? Ain't you old enough to speak for yourself?"

"Not for myself, Calvin!" cried Mr. Sim. "No, no, no! for Sam'l! for Sam'l!"

"Well, I am blowed!" said Calvin Parks.

Mr. Sim leaned forward anxiously. "Don't you see, Cal?" he cried. "I ain't a marryin' man; that's plain to be seen. Sam'l was allers the one for the gals, you know he was. You remember Ivy Bell?"

Calvin nodded.

"Well, that's the way of it!" Mr. Sim continued. "His mind allers run that way; mine didn't. Besides, I ain't a well man; I ain't in no shape to marry, Calvin, no way in the world, if I wanted to, and I don't. Now, Calvin, I want you to kind of urge Sam'l on. We ain't speakin', Sam'l and me, you know that. I told you how 'twas, fust time you come round. Nothin' agin one another, only we don't like. So I can't urge him myself; and fust thing we know some outlandishman or other'll step in and kerry her off, and then where should we be, Sam'l and me? I ask you that, Calvin Parks. We're gettin' on,

you know, Cal; we're five years good older than what you be, and we couldn't abide hired help, no way in the world. You urge Sam'l on to speak to Cousin, won't you now? I'd take it real friendly of you, Cal. I allers thought a sight of you, and so did Ma. 'Twould please Ma if you got a good woman for Sam'l, Cal. Say you'll think about it!"

"I'll think about it!" said Calvin Parks.

An hour later, Calvin was out in the barnyard, leaning over the pigsty, and looking at the finest hogs in the county. Mr. Sam pronounced them so, and he ought to know, Calvin thought. Calvin had never cared for hogs himself.

"You see them hawgs," said Mr. Sam with squeaking enthusiasm, "and you see the best there is. Take 'em for looks, or heft, or eatin', there's no hawgs can touch 'em in this county. I'll go further and say

State. They're a *lovely* hawg, sir! that's what they are; lovely!"

"All black, be they?" asked Calvin, for the sake of saying something.

"All black!" said Mr. Sam. "I bought 'em off'n Reuben Hutch. They was Cousin's choice in the fust place. She likes 'em black; says they look cleaner, and I guess they do. I don't know as you've remarked it, Cal, but I think a sight of Cousin."

He cast a sly glance at Calvin, who again returned inward thanks for the solid brown of his cheeks.

"I should s'pose you might!" he said shortly.

"A sight!" repeated Mr. Sam emphatically. "You show me a smarter woman than that, Calvin Parks, and I'll show you a toad with three tails."

He paused, as if waiting for Calvin to avail himself of this handsome offer.

"Well!" said Calvin, rather morosely. "I ain't got no smarter woman to show. What are you drivin' at, Sam Sill?"

Mr. Sam's little eyes were twinkling, and his sharp features were twisting themselves into knots which were anything but becoming.

"Calvin," he said, "when I look at that young woman — at least not exactly young, but a sight younger than some, and all the better for it — what word do you think I use to myself?"

"I don't know!" said Calvin shortly.

Mr. Sam leaned back, and expanded his red flannel waistcoat.

"Take time, Cal!" he said kindly. "Find a good solid-soundin' word suitable to the occasion, and spit it out!"

"Look at here!" said Calvin, still more shortly. "I come out here to see your hogs, and I've seen 'em. I didn't come out to play guessin' games; if you've got anything

to say to me, say it! If not, I'm goin' home."

Mr. Sam leaned forward, and poked Calvin in the ribs with a skinny forefinger.

"Matrimony's the word, Cal!" he said. "Holy matrimony! Ain't that a good word? ain't it suitable? ain't it what you might call providential? ain't it? hey?" He paused for a reply; but none coming, he went on.

"I made use of that word, Calvin, the fust time Cousin stepped across our thrishhold, four months back; and I've ben makin' use of it every day since then. Now, Cal, I want you to help me!"

"Help you!" repeated Calvin, mechanically.

"Help me!" repeated Mr. Sam. "If you can help me to bring about matrimony between Cousin and Simeon, —"

"*What!*" said Calvin Parks.

Mr. Sam stared. "Between Cousin and

Simeon!" he repeated. "What did you think I said? You could be of assistance to me, Calvin. You know Sim and me ain't havin' any dealin's jest at present, and direckly you come along I says to myself, 'Calvin,' I says, 'is the one who can be of assistance to me.'"

"I thought 'twas you was goin' to marry her!" said Calvin grimly.

"Me, Cal? no! no! What put that into your head?" and Mr. Sam screwed his features afresh, and shook his head emphatically. "I admire Cousin, none more so; but if I was marryin', — and I don't say but I shall, some day, — I should look out for something jest a mite more stylish. But there's plenty of time, plenty of time. Besides, I want to travel, Calvin. I want to see something of the world. Here I've sot all my days, and never ben further than Bangor. Ma never held with the notion of folks goin' out of the State of Maine. 'If

folks want to go to Massachusetts,' she'd say, 'they'd orter be born there.' Now, no disrespect to Ma, you understand, Cal, but that ain't my idee. I want to go to Boston, and maybe New York. I dono but I might go out west and locate there. But there's the farm, you see, Cal, and there's Simeon. Sim ain't a man that's fit to travel, nor yet he ain't able to see to things as should be. But if he and Cousin was man and wife, don't you see, the two of 'em could get on fust-rate, and I could go off. You see how 'tis, Calvin, don't you?"

Calvin Parks turned upon him with a flash.

"What makes you think she'd be seen dead with either one of you two squinny old lobsters?" he asked fiercely.

Mr. Sam stared again.

"A woman, Calvin, wants a home!" he said solemnly. "Anybody can see that. Cousin has money in the bank, and

she's owner of a schooner, but she has no home. I expect she'd have married Reuben if he'd been anyways agreeable *to* marry. He expected she would, sure as shootin'; lotted on it, they say. But take a man with one eye and that rollin', and snug, *and* a bad disposition, why, it ain't no great of an outlook for a woman, even if the farm was better than it is. Anyways, she wouldn't look at him, and that's how she come here. Now here," — he waved his hand in a circle. "Look around you, Calvin Parks! Where is she goin' to find a home like this? for stock, or for truck, or for sightliness, there ain't its ekal in the county. There ain't its ekal in the State. Now, Cal, I'm a fair-minded man. A woman brought this farm up to what it is. Ma done it, sir! I don't say but Sim and me done our best since we growed up, but Ma done the heft on't, and it needs a woman now. It needs a woman, Calvin,

and Cousin needs a home; and I'm of the opinion that she won't get such a bad bargain, even with Simeon thrown in. There's no harm in Simeon, Cal, not a mite!"

"Not a mite!" Calvin echoed mechanically.

"Now," — Mr. Sam drew himself up, and tapped Calvin on the shoulder. "I want you to help me, Calvin Parks!"

Calvin growled, but a growl may mean anything. Mr. Sam took it for assent.

"That's right!" he said. "That's it, Calvin. You talk to Cousin, and tell her about the farm, and kinder throw in a word for Sim now and then. Why, he's a real good fellow, Sim is, when he ain't a darned fool. They'd get on fust-rate. And you talk to him, too, when she's out of the way! Tell him he needs a woman of his own, and like that. Mebbe you might drop a hint about my goin' away, if you see a good

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openin'; why, you're jest the one to make a match, with your pleasant ways, kind o' jokin' and cheerful. Make her feel as if she wanted a man of her own, too. Think about it, Cal! Say you'll think about it!"

"I'll think about it!" said Calvin Parks.

CHAPTER VIII

"PLAYING S'POSE"

CALVIN did think about it. He thought about it as he drove out of the yard, and it was a grave salute that he waved to Mary Sands, smiling on the doorstep in her blue dress, with the low sun glinting on her nut-brown hair.

He thought about it on the road; and hossy missed the usual fire of cheery remarks, grew morose, and jogged on half asleep. He was still thinking about it, when he came to a narrow lane that branched off from the main road, some half a mile from the Sill farm. It was a pretty lane, but it had a deserted look, and there were no wheel-marks on its grass and clover. Coming abreast of this opening, Calvin checked the brown horse with a word, and

sat for some time looking thoughtfully down the lane. It ended, a few hundred yards away, in an open gateway; there was no gate. Beyond stood some huge old maple trees, which might hide anything — or nothing.

"Want to go in, hossy?" asked Calvin. He flicked hossy on the ear, but his tone was not the usual one of friendly banter. Hossy shook his head.

"Might as well!" said Calvin. "I've kep' away so fur, but it's there, you know, hossy, all the same. Gitty up!"

Thus urged, the brown horse jogged slowly up the grassy lane, snatching now and then at the tall grass as he went. Passing through the empty gateway, they came to the maple trees, and saw — only one of them knew before — what they hid. A yawning hole in the ground; at one side of it a well, its covering dropping to pieces, its sweep fallen on the ground;

behind, a tangle of bushes that might once have been a garden. In front, almost on the edge of the hole, some long blocks of granite lay piled one atop of the other; these had been the door-steps, when there was a door.

Calvin Parks sat silent for a long time looking at these things. Then, — "Hossy," he said, "look at there!"

Hossy looked; saw little that appealed to him, and fell to cropping the grass.

"What did I tell you?" said Calvin, addressing some person unseen. "Even the dumb animal won't look at it. Hossy, what do you think of this place, take it as a place? Speak up now!"

Hossy, flicked on the ear, shook himself fretfully, whinnied, and returned to his cropping.

"Nice home to offer a woman?" said Calvin. "Cheerful sort of habitation? Hey? Well, there! you see how 'tis your-

self. A rolling — stone — gathers — no — moss, little hossy."

As he spoke he was climbing down from his perch; now he threw the reins over the brown horse's neck, and walking to the edge of the empty cellar-place, sat down on one of the granite blocks.

"But I want you to understand that I warn't born rollin'!" he continued with some severity. "If you think that, hossy, you show your ignorance. I was a stiddy boy, and a good boy, as boys go. Mother never made no complaint, fur as I know. Poor mother! if I'm glad of anything in this mortal world, it's that mother went before the house did. That old lobster was right, darn his hide! a woman has to have a home. Poor mother! She thought a sight of her home and her gardin. I can't but scarcely feel she must be round somewheres, now; pickin' gooseberries, most likely. Sho! gooseberries in October! well,

butternuts, then! The old butternut tree warn't burned. Hossy, I tell you, it seems as though if I was to turn round this minute I should expect to see mother's white apurn — "

He turned as he spoke, and stopped short. Something white glinted behind the withered bushes of the garden plot.

Calvin Parks sat motionless for a moment, gazing with wide eyes. A cold finger traced his spine, and his heart thumped loud in his ears. The something white seemed to move — a swaying motion; and now a soft voice began to croon, half speaking, half singing.

" I'd — I'd like to know what you are scairt of!" said Calvin Parks, addressing himself. " You might put a name to it. It would be just like mother, wouldn't it, to come back if it was anyways convenient, and see to them butternuts? Well, then! You wouldn't be scairt of mother, would

you? I've no patience with you. The dumb critter there has more spunk than what you have."

The brown horse had raised his head, and his ears were pointed toward the something white that glinted through the bushes.

Another instant, and Calvin rose, and casting a scared look at the brown horse, made his way with faltering steps round the cellar-hole and put aside the bushes.

A small girl in a white pinafore cowered like a rabbit under a straggling rose-bush, and looked up at him with wide eyes of terror. Calvin's eyes, which had been no less wide, softened into a friendly twinkle.

"How de do?" he said. "Pleased to meet you!"

The child drew a long, sobbing breath. "I thought you was ghosts!" she said.

"So I thought you was!" said Calvin. "But we ain't, neither one on us; nor yet

hossy ain't. See hossy there? you never heard of a ghost hossy, did you now?"

The child's face brightened as she looked at the brown horse, stolidly cropping his clover. The tucked-in corners of her mouth looked as if a smile were trying to come out, but was not allowed.

"And what was you doin' here all by your lonesome?" asked Calvin.

"I was playin' s'pose," said the child soberly.

"I want to know!" said Calvin. "How do you play it?"

The child inspected him critically for a moment; then the smile fairly broke loose, and twinkled all over her face.

"I'll show you!" she said; and with a pretty gesture she patted the dry grass beside her. Calvin was down in an instant, his long legs curled up in some mysterious way so that they showed as little as might be.

"Up anchor!" he said. "Yo heave ho, and off we go, to the land of Spose-y-oh!"

The child bubbled into a laugh.

"I guess you're funny!" she said.

"I guess I am!" said Calvin Parks. "Comical Cal — well now, how long is it since I heard that?"

"Comical Cal,
Scairt of a gal!"

There was a little gal jest about your age used to say that whenever I passed her house."

"Was you?" inquired the child.

"Was I what? scairt? yes, I was! scairt out of my boots, if I'd had any."

"Why was you?"

"Why was Silas's gray hoss gray? This ain't playin' s'pose, little un. S'pose you start in!"

"Why," said the child; "well — you see — you just s'pose, you know. You can

s'pose about anything; I do it at home, and sometimes — only don't tell — I s'pose in meetin', if I had a bunnet like — but you never saw her, I s'pose. But most of all I like to s'pose about this place, because there isn't anything, so you can have anything you like. See?"

"*I* see!" said Calvin.

"There used to be a house here!" the child went on. "There truly did."

"You don't say!" said Calvin.

"That was the cellar of it;" she nodded toward the yawning gulf, full of briars and blackened brick and timbers. "The house was burned up — no, I mean down — no, I mean *all* burned, both ways, long ago; ever 'n' ever 'n' ever so long."

"Ever 'n' ever 'n' ever so long!" repeated Calvin.

"This was the gardin. This is a rose-bush I'm settin' under. It has white roses in summer, white with pinky in the middle."

"You bet it has! and the next one has red damask, big as a piny, and sweet — there!"

The child stared. "How did you know?" she asked.

"I'm jest learnin' the game," said Calvin. "Clap on sail, little un!"

"But it's funny, because you s'posed right! Well — and so I play s'pose the house was there, and it was all white marble with a gold roof. And s'pose a little girl lived there, about as big as me, with golden hair that came down to her feet; and she had a white dress, and a blue dress, and a pink dress, and a silk dress, and all kinds of dresses; and shoes and stockin's to match every single one. Have you s'posed that?"

"I'm gettin' there!" said Calvin. "Gimme time! I can't s'pose all them stockin's to once, you know."

"I can s'pose things right off!" said the

child. "But p'raps it's different when you are old. Well! And s'pose she had a mother, and *she* was a beautiful lady, and she had a velvet dress, purple, like a piece in Aunt Susan's quilt. It's as soft as a baby, or a new kitten. And s'pose the little girl came out into the gardin, and said, 'Mittie May, come and play with me!' and s'pose I went, and s'pose she took me into the house, and into a room that was all pink, with silver chairs and sofys, and pink curtains, and a pink pianner, — "

"Belay there, young un!" said Calvin. "You're off soundin's. You don't want the pianner should be pink. Why, 'twould be a sight!"

"*I* think 'twould be lovely!" cried the child. "All smooth, like the pond looks when the sun is goin' down."

Calvin shook his head gravely. "I don't go with that!" he said, "not a mite. *I* say, s'pose the pianner was white, with

pink roses painted on it. I see one like that once, to Savannah, Georgia, and it was handsome, I tell ye. Make it white with pink roses, little un!"

"All right!" said the child. "And anyhow, s'pose the lady played on it, and the little girl —" she turned suddenly shy, and hung her head.

"Will you laugh if I say her name?" she asked wistfully.

"Laugh!" said Calvin. "Do I look like laughin', young un? nor yet I don't feel like it. What is her name?"

"S'pose it's Clementina Loverina Beauty! I made up the middle one myself. S'pose she asked me to dance, and we danced, and the floor was pink marble, and we had gold slippers on, and my hair grew down to my feet too, and — and — and then s'pose we was hungry, and Clementina Loverina Beauty waved her hand, and a table come up through the floor with roast

chicken on it, and cramb'ry sauce, and grapes, and icecream and cake, and — and we eat all we could hold, and then we went to sleep in a gold bed with silk sheets. There! now it's your turn."

"My turn?" said Calvin vaguely.

"Yes! your turn to s'pose. What do you s'pose, about this place?"

"Oh! this place. Well, now you're talkin'. Only I don't know as I can play this game as pretty as you do, Mittie May. I don't believe I can git you up any white marble buildin's, nor gold floors, nor that kind of thing. 'Tain't my line, you see."

"Why not?" asked the child. "Because you are a brown man can't you?"

Calvin nodded. "I expect that's about the size of it," he said gravely. "I'm a brown man. Yes, little un, you surely hit it off that time. And bein' a brown man, it stands to reason that I can't s'pose nothin' risin' out of that hole but a brown house.

S'pose it's there now, what? a long brown house, facin' south, see? This is the way it lays. Over this main sullar is the kitchen — big kitchen it is, with lots of winders, and all of 'em sunny, some ways of it; I dono just how they can be, but so they seem. Flowers in 'em, too; sweet — I tell ye; and then the settin'-room openin' out of it."

"What's in the settin'-room?" asked Mittie May. "S'pose we're in it now; tell me!"

"S'pose we are! There's a rag carpet on the floor; see it? hit-or-miss pattern. Mother made it herself; leastways, the mother of the boy I'm comin' to bimeby. I always liked hit-or-miss better than any other pattern. Then there's smaller rugs, and one of 'em has a dog on it, with real glass eyes; golly, but they shine! And a table in the middle with a lamp on it, glass lamp, with a red shade; and a Bible, and

Cap'n Cook's voyages, and Longfellow's poems. Mother was a great hand for poetry — that is, the boy's mother, you understand."

"S'pose about the boy!" said Mittie May eagerly.

"Well — s'pose he was a brown boy, same as I am man; brown to match the house. Hair and eyes, jumper and pants, just plain brown; not much of a boy to look at, you understand. S'pose there was jest him and father and mother. There had been a little gal; — s'pose she was like you, little un, slim and light on her feet, singin' round the house — but she was wanted somewheres else, and she went. S'pose the boy thought a sight of his mother, specially after the little gal went. Him and her used to play together for all the world like two kids. S'pose he dug her gardin for her, and sowed her seeds, and then he'd take and watch the plants comin' up, and seems though

he couldn't wait for 'em to bloom so's he could git a posy to carry in to mother. Yes, sir! she liked them posies, mother did; she liked 'em, sure enough!"

He was silent a moment. "Go on!" cried the child. "You ain't half s'posing, brown man."

"No more I am!" said Calvin Parks. "Well, little un, I dono as I can play this game real well, after all. S'pose after a spell the boy's mother went away too. Where? Well, she'd go to the best place there was, you know; nat'rally she would."

"That's heaven!" said the child decidedly.

"Jes' so! to be sure!" Calvin assented. "S'pose she went to heaven; to see after the little gal, likely; hey? That'd leave father and the boy alone, wouldn't it? Well now, s'pose father couldn't stand it real well without her. What then, little un? S'pose the more he tried it the less he liked

it, till bumby he begun to take things to make him forget, as warn't the best things in the world for him to take. S'pose he did; do you blame him?"

"N—no!" said the child. "Unless you mean stole 'em!"

"No! no! not that kind of takin', little un; 'tother kind, like when you take med'cine. S'pose he kind o' made believe *'twas* med'cine for a spell. Then s'pose he got so he warn't jest like himself, and spoke kind o' sharp, and took a strap to the boy now and then, harder than he would by natur', you wouldn't blame him, would you? Not a mite! But s'pose things went on that way till they warn't real agreeable for neither one of 'em. Then — s'pose one night — when he warn't himself, mind you! — he shook out his pipe on the settin'-room carpet and set the house afire. You wouldn't blame him for that either, would you? Poor father!"

He paused.

"What do you s'pose then?" cried the child eagerly. "Did the house burn up?"

Calvin made a silent gesture toward the ruined cellar. Something in it struck the child silent too. She crept nearer, and slid her hand into Calvin's.

"You don't s'pose they was burned, do you?" she said in an awestruck whisper.

"No, they warn't burned," said Calvin slowly. "But father never helt his head up again, and 'twarn't a great while before he was gone too, after mother and the little gal. So then the boy was left alone. See?"

"*Poor* brown boy!" said the child. "S'pose what he did then!"

"S'pose he lit out!" said Calvin Parks; "And s'pose I light out too, little gal. It's gettin' towards sundown, and I've got quite a ways to go before night."

He rose, and stretched his brown length, towering a great height above the rose-bush.

"But before I go," he added; "s'pose we see what hossy's got in back of him. I shouldn't wonder a mite if we found a stick of candy. S'pose we go and look!"

"S'pose we do!" cried Mittie May.

CHAPTER IX

CANDY-MAKING

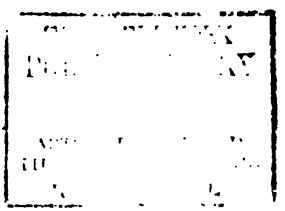
"If there's a pleasanter place than this in your village, I wish you'd show it to me!" said Calvin Parks. "I declare, Mr. Cheeseman, it does me good every time I come in here."

Mr. Cheeseman looked about him with contented eyes.

"It is pleasant," he said. "I'm glad you like it, friend Parks, for you are one of the folks I like to see in it, and them isn't everybody."

Mr. Ivory Cheeseman certainly did look rather like a monkey, but such a wise monkey! He was little and spare, with nothing profuse about him save his white hair, which grew thick and close as a cap;

MR. CHEESEMAN.



his whole aspect was dry and frosty, " like the right kind of winter mornin'," Calvin Parks said when he described the old man to Mary Sands. The kitchen in which he and Calvin were sitting was just behind the shop; a low, dark room, with a little stove in the middle, glowing like a red jewel, and waking dusky gleams in the pots and pans ranged along the walls. They were not altogether ordinary pots and pans. Uncle Ivory, as East Cyrus called him, was a collector in a modest way, and his bits of copper, brass and pewter were dear to his heart. Lonzo, the village " natural," found the gaiety of his life in polishing them, and receiving pay in sugar-plums. He was at work now in a dim corner, chuckling to himself as he scoured a huge old pewter dish.

The air was full of the warm, homely fragrance of molasses candy; a pot of it was boiling on the stove, and from time to

time Uncle Ivory stirred it, lifted a spoonful, and watched the drip. On a table near by other candies were cooling, peanut taffy, lemon drops, and great masses of pink and white cream candy.

"Yes," said Calvin, pursuing his own thoughts. "This is another pleasant home. Considerable many of 'em in these parts, or so it appears to a lone person. I judge you're a single man, Mr. Cheeseman?"

"Widower!" said Mr. Cheeseman briefly.

"That so!" said Calvin.

They watched the molasses for a time, as it bubbled up in little gold-brown mounds that flowed away in foam as the spoon touched them.

"She's killin' good to-day!" remarked the old man.

"Cream-o'-tartar?" asked Calvin.

"Yes! I never use any other. Yes, sir; I had a good wife, a real good one; and

might have had another, if I'd judged it convenient."

Calvin looked up expectantly; it was evident that more was coming.

Mr. Cheeseman began to stir the molasses with long, slow sweeps of the spoon, talking the while.

"It was this way. My wife had a friend that she thought the world of. Well, she thought the world of me too, and when it come time for her to go, nothin' to it but I must marry this woman. The night before 'Liza was taken, she says to me, 'Ivory,' she says, 'I've left it in writin' that if you marry Elviry you'll get that two thousand dollars that's in the bank; and if not it goes to the children.' Children was married and settled, two of 'em, and well fixed. 'I want you to promise me you will!' she says.

"And did you?" asked Calvin.

"No, I didn't. I warn't goin' to tie my-

self up again. I'd been married thirty years, and that was enough."

"What *did* you say, if I may ask?"

"I said I'd think about it, and let her know in the mornin'. I knew she'd be gone by then, and she was."

Again they watched the boiling in silence. Calvin looked somewhat disturbed.

"But yet you liked the married state?" he asked presently.

"Fust-rate!" said Mr. Cheeseman placidly. He glanced at Calvin; stirred the candy, and glanced again.

"You ain't married, I think, friend Parks?"

"N—no!" said Calvin slowly. "I ain't; but — fact is, I'm wishful to be, but I don't see my way to it."

"I want to know!" said Mr. Cheeseman. "Would you like to free your mind, or don't you feel to? I'm not curious, not a mite; but yet there's times when a person can tell

better what he thinks if he outs with it to somebody else. Like molasses! Take it in the cask, and it's cold, and slow, and not much to look at; but take and bile it, and stir it good, and — you see!"

The molasses boiled up in a fragrant geyser, threatening to overflow the pot; but obedient to the spoon, fell away again in foamy ripples.

"Like that!" Mr. Cheeseman repeated. "If it would clear your mind any to bile over, friend Parks, so do!"

Calvin glanced toward the corner. "Does he take much notice?" he asked.

"Lonzo? no! he's no more than a child. But yet 'tis time for him to go home. Lonzo! dinner-time!"

The simpleton rose and shambled forward, a huge uncouth figure with a face like a platter; not an empty platter now, though, for it was wreathed in smiles. He held out the shining dish. "Done good?" he asked.

"Elegant, Lonzo, elegant! you are smart, no mistake about that. Help yourself to the cream candy! that square pan is o' purpose for you."

Lonzo stowed a third of the contents of the pan in his cavernous mouth, the rest in various pockets, and departed grinning happily.

"He's as good as gold!" said Mr. Cheeseman. "Not a mite of harm in Lonzo; I wish all sensible folks was as pleasant. Now, friend Parks, bile up!"

Calvin pulled his brown moustache, and looked shy.

"I guess I'm pretty slow molasses, Mr. Cheeseman," he said. "I ain't used to bilin', except in the way of gettin' mad once in a while, and I don't do that real often; but yet I'll try my best."

In a few words he described the twins and his relation to them. "No kin, you know, blood nor married; only just neigh-

bors all our lives till late years. I should expect to do a neighbor's part by the boys, week-days and Sundays, and I dono as ever I've done contrary."

Then he told, with more reserve, of " Miss Hands's " coming; of his finding her there; of her striking him as, take it all round, the likeliest woman ever he saw; of his saying to himself that if ever things turned out so that he had a right to ask a woman to hitch her wagon to a middle-aged hoss that had some go in him yet, here was the woman.

" But yet I told myself first thing," he added, taking up the poker and tapping the bright little stove with it; " I told myself she would be marryin' one of the boys most likely; I kep' that in mind steady, as you may say. I thought I was so used to the idee that it wouldn't jar me much of any when it come to the fact. But it did; yes siree, it did, sure enough.

'Peared as if a cog slipped somehow, and my whole works was jolted out of kilter."

He looked anxiously at Mr. Cheeseman, who nodded with grave comprehension.

"And when it comes," he went on, "to each one of them beseechin' me to get her to marry the other — why — I really am blowed, Mr. Cheeseman, and do you wonder at it?"

"She's done!" said Mr. Cheeseman, rising. "Lend a hand with that pan, friend Parks; the big square one yonder."

A moment of anxious silence followed, as the thick golden-brown mass flowed into the pan, curled into the corners, and finally settled in a smooth glossy sheet.

"There!" said Mr. Cheeseman. "Now we'll let her cool a spell till she's fit to handle. Take your seat, friend Parks! No, I don't wonder no way in the world at your bein' blowed, or jolted either. What gets me is,

why don't you speak for yourself, like that other feller in the story?"

Calvin Parks pulled his moustache meditatively.

"I know!" he said. "Longfellow's poems. Mother thought a sight of Longfellow's poems. John Alden, warn't it? and the old fellow was Miles Standish? Yes, I rec'lect well. But you see, Mr. Cheeseman, the young woman herself give him the tip that time. 'Why don't you speak for yourself, John?' I rec'lect well enough. Now, Miss Hands never give me any reason to think she'd rather have me than ary one of the boys."

"Has she given you any reason to think she wouldn't?" queried the old man.

"Well — no! I don't know as she has."

"Well, then, where does the trouble come in? You're twice the man they are, I take it, from all accounts. Don't know as ever I saw them, but I knew the old woman,

and used to hear of her goin's on bringing these young uns up. I don't see as you're bound to canvass for them, no way in the world. Rustle in and get her yourself, is what I say."

Calvin looked at him anxiously.

"You see, Mr. Cheeseman, it's this way," he said. "I think a sight of her, don't I? I've said so, and I haven't said half. That bein' so, nat'rally I want her to be well fixed, don't you see? The best that can be, ain't that so? Now, either one of those two darned old huckleberries can give her a first-rate home; as nice a place as there is in this State, house, stock and fixin's all to match. A woman wants a home; one of them old gooseberries said so, and it's true. Now, what have I got to offer her? I've got a hole in the ground, and a candy route. You see how it is, don't you, Mr. Cheeseman?"

Mr. Cheeseman reflected for a few minutes.

"Where's your savin's?" he asked abruptly. "You were master of a coasting schooner for ten year, you say. Single man, and no bad habits, I should judge, — you'd ought to have money in the bank, young man. What have you done with it?"

Calvin hung his head.

"That's right!" he said. "That's so, Mr. Cheeseman. I had money in the bank. Last year I drawed it out, like a fool; somebody'd been talkin' investments to me, and I thought I could do better with it; and — well, I had it on board, and there was a feller, — well, I needn't go into that. I never thought he would have, if his mind had been quite straight. Wife died, and he warn't the same man afterwards. You can see how 'twas! He took it, and then got drownded with it in his pants pocket — or so it seemed likely — so nobody got much out of that deal. I had some part of it in another place, though, sufficient to buy me

the route, and five dollars over. I put the five dollars in the bank, but it don't yield what you'd call an income precisely. So there it is, Mr. Cheeseman, and I can't see that things looks much like matrimony for little Calvin. Honest now, do you?"

Mr. Cheeseman rumpled his thick hair till it gave the impression of Papa Monkey's having married a white cockatoo. He glanced at Calvin sidewise.

"She has money, —" he said slowly.

"And she can keep it!" said Calvin Parks. "I ain't that kind."

"Just so!" said Mr. Cheeseman. "Precisely. Where are you livin' now, friend Parks?"

"I'm boardin' with Widder Marlin;" said Calvin.

The old man looked up sharply. "You are?" he said. "Humph! that don't seem a very likely place, 'cordin' to folks's ideas

round here. Them two aren't thought specially well of by their neighbors."

"That so?" said Calvin. "I guess they won't hurt me any. I sailed mate to Cap'n Marlin," he added, "and he was always good to me."

"Humph!" said Mr. Cheeseman again. "I see." He rumpled his hair again, and rose to his feet. "Friend Parks," he said, slowly, "you've got to lay by, that's all there is to it; and I'm going to show you how."

CHAPTER X

JOHN ALDEN — WITH A DIFFERENCE

WINTER had come. Early December though it was, the snow lay deep and smooth over meadow and hill, and hung in fluffy masses on the branches of pine and fir. Calvin Parks had got rid of the wheels that never ceased to incommode him, and jingled along merrily on runners, both he and Hossy enjoying the change.

It had become a matter of course that he should turn in at the Sills' gateway whenever he passed along their road, and he managed to pass once or twice a week. So on this crystal morning he found himself driving into the stable yard almost unconsciously. The brown horse whinnied as he clattered into the stable, and an answering whinny came from the furthest stall in the corner.

"That's old John sayin' good mornin', hossy!" said Calvin. "How are you, John? Who else is to home?"

He looked along the row of stalls. "Here's the old hoss of all, and here's the mare. The young colt is out; presume likely Sam is gone to market, hossy. What say to gettin' a bite in his stall? He won't be back till dinner time."

Hossy approving, Calvin unharnessed him, and he stepped into the stall without further invitation.

"Now you be real friendly with old John and the mare!" said Calvin, "and I'll come for you sooner than you're ready."

The brown horse flung him a brief snort of assurance, and plunged his head into the manger; and Calvin fastened the door and made his way slowly toward the house.

The back view of the Sill farmhouse was hardly less pleasant than the front, especially when, as now, the morning

sun lay full on the warm yellow of the house, the bright green of the door, and the reddish granite of the well-scoured steps. A screen of dark evergreens set off all these cheerful tints; and to make the picture still gayer Mary Sands, a scarlet " sontag " tied trimly over her blue dress, was sitting on the cellar door, picking over tomatoes.

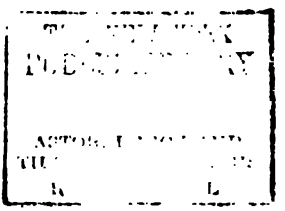
Calvin Parks was conscious of missing Hossy. He wanted some one to appeal to.

" Do you see that? " he murmured, addressing the landscape. " Do you call that handsome? because if you don't, you are a calf's-head, whatever else you may be."

Mary Sands looked up, and her bright face grew brighter at sight of him.

" Oh, Mr. Parks! " she cried. " I am glad to see you. I've been wishin' all the week you'd come by and stop in a bit. Now this is a pleasure, surely! Come right in! "

"'HOLD ON, MISS HANDS!' SAID CALVIN, AS SHE MOVED TOWARD THE DOOR."



"Hold on, Miss Hands!" said Calvin, as she moved toward the door. "Hold on just a minute. How about the tomaytoes?"

"Oh, they can wait!" said Mary. "I was just turning 'em so they'd get the sun on all sides."

"Ain't it remarkable late for tomaytoes?" asked Calvin. "I 'dono as ever I see ripe ones at this season. I expect you can do what you like with gardin truck, Miss Hands, same as with most things."

Mary blushed and twinkled.

"Oh, I don't know!" she answered. "I've always had good luck with late vegetables. I do suppose I've kept these tomaytoes on later than common, though; I confess I'm rather proud of them, Mr. Parks. Cousins say I tend 'em like young chickens, and I don't know but I do. I put 'em out mornings, when 'tis bright and warm like this, and take 'em in before sundown, fear

they'll get chilled. Anything ripens so much better in the sun."

"I don't believe you've turned 'em all," said Calvin. "I should admire to set here a spell, if 'tis warm enough for you. I ripen better in the sun, too;" he twinkled at her. "*Is* it warm enough for you?" he added anxiously.

"My, yes!" said Mary Sands. "Why, 'tis like summer in this bright sun, and this cellar door is warm as a stove. Well, if you're really a mind to help, Mr. Parks, — I'm sure you're more than kind."

There was plenty of room on the cellar door for them and the tomatoes. Calvin curled up his long legs under him, and gave his attention for several minutes to the Crimson Cushions and Ponderosas, turning them with careful nicety.

"Pretty, ain't they?" he said; "some of 'em, that is."

"Real pretty!" said Mary Sands. "I

do enjoy them, Mr. Parks; 'tis a kind of play with me, tending my tomaytoes. I expect I'm foolish about growin' things."

"I expect if there was more had your kind of foolishness," replied Calvin, "the world would be a better place than it is."

"See this one!" Mary went on; "for all the world like a red satin pincushion my grandmother used to have in her basket. 'Tis well named, the Crimson Cushion is."

"Look at this feller," said Calvin, "all green and yeller, and squinnied up like his co't was too tight for him. It looks like the boys; honest now, don't it, Miss Hands?"

Mary tinkled a reproachful laugh.

"Now Mr. Parks, I wonder at you. Poor Cousins!"

"I ain't takin' up no collection for the boys!" said Calvin coolly. "Where's Sam? I see the young colt is out."

"He's gone to market; and Cousin Sims'

in a dreadful takin', for fear he'll get run away with, or hove out, or something."

Calvin stared. "Why, the colt is ten year old if he is a day!" he said.

"I told him that; but he said it didn't make no odds, he'd never found out he was grown up, and acted accordin'. He werries terrible about Cousin Sam every time he goes out, and Cousin Sam werries about him. I notice it growin' on the two of 'em. Mr. Parks, I believe that down in their hearts them two are missin' each other more than tongue can tell, and neither one of them knows what's the matter with him."

"You don't say!" said Calvin. "Why don't they make up, then? Ridic'lous old lobsters!"

"They don't know how!" said Mary. "Even if they mistrust what ails 'em, and I don't believe they do as yet."

She was silent a moment, and then added:

" Mr. Parks, I feel I can speak out to you, that have been their friend right along. I wish't one of Cousins would marry; there! I do so!"

Calvin Parks's face, which had been radiant with cheerfulness, turned to brown wood. He looked straight before him, with no more expression than the green tomato he held in his hand.

" That so!" he said slowly. " Which — which one of 'em would you consider best suited to matrimony, Miss Hands, if 'tisn't too much to ask?"

" I don't know as I care which it is," cried Mary, earnestly, — Calvin winced, and dropped the tomato, which rolled slowly down the cellar door and plumped into the snow, — " so long as it's one of 'em. They ought to have a woman *belongin'* to them, Mr. Parks, as would take an interest in things because they was hers, you understand, and care for whichever one she'd

marry and the other one too. They'd never ought to have been *let* act so foolish. You see, they'd always had a woman to do for 'em, and think for 'em, and *live* for 'em; and the minute she was gone they fell to pieces, kind of; 'tis often so with men folks," she said simply. "They ain't calc'lated to be alone. But even now, if there was a woman belongin' to 'em, that had the right to say how things should be, I believe she could bring 'em together in no time."

There was a long silence, Mary turning tomatoes, Calvin staring straight ahead of him with the same wooden countenance. At length he cleared his throat and spoke slowly and laboriously.

"There's something in what you say, Miss Hands, and I'm bound to confess that — that I've had thoughts of something of the kind before you spoke. But — well, we'll put it this way. Which of them two old —

of them two individuals, we'll call 'em for this once — would a woman be likely to fancy? I — I should be pleased to have your opinion on that p'int."

Mary considered, turning the Crimson Cushions meanwhile with a careful hand. Calvin, misunderstanding her silence, went on.

"What I mean is — if a woman was thinkin' of matrimony — " he winced again, seeming to hear Mr. Sam's voice squeaking out the word, — "if a woman was thinkin' of matrimony, and one of them two should take her fancy more than the other — why — a person as was friendly to all concerned might try his hand in the way of helpin' to bring it about."

Mary glanced up quickly at him, but no friendly twinkle responded to her glance. Calvin's brown eyes were still dark with trouble, and he still stared moodily away from her.

"'Tis hard to say!" she replied after a pause. "Cousin Sim needs the most care."

"He does so!" said Calvin Parks. "Sim certinly needs care. And — he's a home-lovin' man, Simeon is, and sober, and honest. There's things you could find in Sim that's no worse than what you'd find in some others, I make no doubt; and — and any one would have a first-rate home, and every comfort."

"Oh! Mr. Parks, but do you think any woman *could* make up her mind to marry Cousin Sim?" said Mary.

Calvin gave her a bewildered look, and went on, still slowly and laboriously.

"Not bein' a woman myself, ma'am, nor had any special dealin's with the sex since I growed up, it ain't easy for me to form an opinion. But since you ask me honest — well — maybe not! This brings us to Sam'l. Now Sam'l is a man that has his

faculties, such as they are. He has his health, and he's smart and capable. A good farmer Sam has always been, and a good manager. Careful and savin'; and there'd be the house, same as in Simeon's case. Anybody would have them a good home, and — "

"Oh! my *goodness!*" cried Mary Sands. Calvin looked up with a start, and saw her face on fire.

"What is it?" he asked, helplessly.

"Oh! don't you see?" she cried. "I was thinkin' about them, poor old things, and wishin' they might find some one; but you've shown me the other side. Mr. Parks, they never, never, *never* could find any woman *to* marry them!"

Calvin Parks's face was a study of bewilderment.

"I — I don't understand!" he faltered. "Do you mean that you wouldn't —

couldn't — fancy either one of the boys, Miss Hands?"

"*Me!*" cried Mary Sands; "me fancy one of them!"

Involuntarily she rose to her feet; Calvin rose too, looking anxiously down at her. There was a moment of tense silence. "Do — do you *want* me to marry one of them, Mr. Parks?" asked Mary, in a small shaking voice.

"Want you to?" cried Calvin Parks. "*Want* you to?"

At this moment Mr. Sam came round the corner. Mary Sands fled, and as she ran into the house there floated back from the closing door — was it a sound of laughter — or of tears?

"What in the name of hemlock is goin' on here?" asked Mr. Sam. "Calvin Parks, what are you about, treadin' of them tomaytoes under foot? You've creshed as much

as a dozen of 'em under them great hoofs of your'n."

"That you, Sam?" said Calvin Parks. "How are you? I'd shut my mouth if I was you. You look handsomer that way than what you do with it open."

CHAPTER XI

CONCERNING TRADE

It was Christmas week, and East Cyrus was making ready for the festival. The butcher's shop was hung with turkeys and chickens, and bright with green of celery and red of cranberries and apples. The dry-goods store displayed in its window, beside the folds of gingham and "wool goods" and the shirt-waist patterns, a shining array of dolls and sofa-pillows, pincushions and knitted shoes; while the bookstore had all the holiday magazines, and a splendid assortment of tissue paper in every possible shade.

But delightful as all this was to the eyes of East Cyrus, there was one shop that so far outshone the rest that all day long an admiring group of children stood before it,

gazing in at the window, and fairly goggling with wonder and longing. This was the shop of Mr. Ivory Cheeseman. Across and across the window were strings of silver tinsel, wonderful enough in themselves, but still more wonderful for the freight they bore; canes of every description, from the massive walking-stick that might have supported Lonzo's giant frame, down to dapper and delicate affairs no bigger than one's little finger; and all made of candy, red and white and yellow. That was a sight in itself, I should hope; but that was not all. The broad shelf beneath was covered with tinsel-sprinkled green, and here were creatures many, cats and lions and elephants, dromedaries and horses and turtles, all in clear barley sugar, red and yellow and white. Chocolate mice there were, too, bigger than the cats as a rule; and flanking these zoölogical wonders, row upon row of shining glass jars, containing every stick

that ever was twisted, every drop that ever was dropped.

Inside, a long counter overflowed with the more recondite forms of goodies, caramels, and burnt almonds, chocolate creams and the like; behind this counter a pretty girl stood smiling, ready to dispense delight in any sugary form, at so much a pound.

In the kitchen behind the shop the little stove was glowing like a friendly demon, and beside the long table stood Mr. Cheeseman and Calvin Parks, deep in talk.

"Now you want," said the old man, "to get a *good price* for these goods, friend Parks. I'm lettin' you have 'em at wholesale price, because you're a man I like, and because I wish to see you well fixed and provided with a partner for life. Now here's your chance, and I'm goin' to speak right out plain. You're a good fellow, but you are not a man of business!"

"That's right!" murmured Calvin

meekly. "That's straight, stem to stern."

"I hear about you now and again, in the way of trade," Mr. Cheeseman went on. "Folks come in, and talk a spell; you know how 'tis. I've gone so fur as to ask folks about you, folks whose opinion was worth havin'. They all like you fust-rate; say you're a good feller, none better, but you'll never make good. Ask 'em why, and they tell about your givin' goods away right along; a half a dozen sticks here, a roll of lozengers there, quarter-pounds all along the ro'd so to say. Now, young man, that ain't trade!"

Calvin's slow blood crept up among the roots of his hair. "I don't know as it's any of their darned business!" he said slowly.

"It ain't, nor yet it ain't mine to tell you; nor yet it ain't the wind's; yet it keeps on blowin' just the same, and while you're cussin' it for liftin' your hat off, it's turnin' your windmill for you. See?"

Calvin raised his head with a jerk.

"I see!" he said. "That's straight. I see that, Mr. Cheeseman, and thank you for sayin' it. But — well now, see how 'tis at my end. I'm joggin' along the ro'd, see? hossy and me, who so peart, lookin' for trade. Well, here come a little gal; pretty, like as not, — little gals mostly are, and when they ain't you're sorry enough to make it even — and when she sees us she stops, and hossy stops. He knows! wouldn't go on if I told him to. Say she don't speak a word; say she just looks at me kind o' wishful; what would you do? She's a child, and she wants a stick of candy; that's what I'm there for, ain't it, to see that she gets it? Well! and she hasn't got a cent. What would you do? Would you drive off and leave her cryin' in the ro'd behind you?"

"I would!" said Mr. Cheeseman firmly. "She'd ought to have got a cent from her

Ma, and she'll do it next time if you don't give in now."

"Mebbe she has no Ma!" said Calvin gloomily. "Mebbe her Ma's a Tartar."

"That ain't your lookout!" retorted Mr. Cheeseman. "Now, friend Parks, it comes to just this. You put this to yourself straight; are you runnin' a candy route, or an orphan asylum?"

Calvin was silent, gazing darkly at the pan of cinnamon drops before him. Mr. Cheeseman, having driven his nail home, put away his hammer.

"Now about your stock!" he said cheerfully. "You rather run to sticks in your fancy, but if I was you I'd go a mite more into fancy truck Christmas time. Gives 'em a change, and seems more holiday like. Take this lobster loaf, now!"

He laid his hand on a huge mass, chocolate-coated, its side displaying strata of red and white. "This is a good article when

you strike a large family or a corner store. It's cheap, and it's fillin'. You let me put you up a couple of loaves; what say?"

"All right!" said Calvin, still gloomily. "What next?"

"Well, here's chicken bones!" and Mr. Cheeseman picked up a handful of short white sticks. "These is good goods; try one!"

Calvin crunched a stick. "Chocolate fillin'?" he said.

"Yes; with just a dite of peanut butter to give it a twist. Children like 'em; like the name, too; makes 'em think of the turkey that's comin'. Two or three pounds of them? That's right! All the sticks, I s'pose? and all the drops? That's it! I expect you to make your fortune this time, and no mistake. Now we come to gum-drops! how about them?"

"Well," said Calvin, "I never found gum drops what you'd call real amusin'

myself; I like something with a mite more snap to it, don't you?"

"Did, when I had teeth like yours!" Mr. Cheeseman replied. "But you take old folks, or folks that's had their teeth out, and say, 'gum drops' to 'em, and they'll run like chickens. They like something soft, you see. How's your route off for teeth?"

"Why — I don't know as I've noticed specially!" said Calvin, his brown eyes growing round.

"Fust thing a candy man ought to notice! Well, you take a good stock of gum drops, that's my advice. Now come to the animals — what is it, Lonzo?"

Lonzo shambled in from the shop; the tears were running down his platter face, and his huge frame shook with sobs.

"She — she won't give me the el'phant!" he said.

"What elephant? Cheer up, Lonzo!

don't you cry, son; Christmas is comin', you know."

"You said — you said — if I cleaned the dishes all up good for Christmas I could take my pick, and I picked the el'phant, and she won't give it to me!"

At this juncture the pretty girl appeared, flushed and defiant.

"Mr. Cheeseman, he wants that big elephant, the handsomest thing in the window; and it's a shame, and he sha'n't have it. I offered him the one you made first, that got its leg broke, and he won't look at it. There's just as much eatin' to it, for I saved the leg."

"I don't want to eat it!" sobbed Lonzo. "I want to love it a spell fust."

Mr. Cheeseman looked grave. "Well!" he said, "we'll see, son! You stop cryin', anyhow."

He went into the shop, Calvin following him, and they looked over the low green

curtain into the show-window. In the very centre, towering above the lions, camels and rabbits, stood a majestic white elephant fully a foot high. His tusks were of clear barley sugar; he carried a gilded howdah in which sat an affable personage with chocolate countenance and peppermint turban; the whole was a triumph of art, and Mr. Cheeseman gazed on it with pride, and Calvin with admiration.

"It's the handsomest piece of confectionery I ever saw!" said Calvin with conviction.

"It *is* handsome, I'm free to confess!" said Mr. Cheeseman. "It cost me consid'able labor, that did. Take it out careful, Cynthy!"

"Mr. Cheeseman! you ain't goin' to give it to Lonzo!" cried the pretty girl indignantly.

"Certin I am!" said the old man. "I told him he should take his pick, and he's

taken it. I didn't think of that figger, 'tis true, but what I say I stand to. Easy there! I guess you'd better let me lift it out, Cynthy!"

Very tenderly he lifted out the glittering trophy and placed it in Lonzo's outstretched hands. The simpleton chuckled his rapture, and retired to his dim corner — to worship, one might have thought; he put his prize on a low table and grovelled before it on the floor.

Mr. Cheeseman, heedless of Cynthy's lamentations, proceeded to re-arrange the show-window, trying one effect and another, head on one side and eyes screwed critically. Satisfied at length, he turned slowly and rather reluctantly toward Calvin Parks, who had been standing silently by.

"After all," he said apologetically, "Christmas is for the children, and Lonzo is the Lord's child, my wife used to say, and I expect she was right."

Calvin's twinkle burst into a smile.

"That's all right, Mr. Cheeseman!" he said. "That suits me first-rate. I was only wonderin' whether it was just exactly what you would call trade!"

CHAPTER XII

CALVIN'S WATERLOO

CHRISTMAS EVE. All day a blaze of white and gold, softening now into cold glories of rose and violet over the great snow-fields. The road, white upon white, outlined with fringes of trees, and here and there a stretch of stump fence, was as empty as the fields, the solitary sleigh with its solitary occupant seeming only to emphasize the loneliness.

Calvin Parks looked down the long stretch of road into which he had just turned, and gave a long whistle.

"Hossy," he said, "do you know what this ro'd wants? It wants society! I don't know as it would be reasonable to expect a house, or even a barn, but it does seem as if they might scare up a cow; what?"

Hossy whinnied sympathetically.

"Just so!" said Calvin. "That's what I say. Christmas Eve and all, it does really appear as if they might scare up a cow. Not that she'd be likely to trade to any great extent. What say? She'd buy as much as that last woman did? That's so, hossy; you're right there. But we ain't complainin', you and me, I want you to understand. We've done real well this trip, and before we get our little oats to-night we'll work off every stick in the whole concern, you see if we don't, and have money to put in the bank, io, money to put in the bank. Gitty up, you hossy!" He flourished his whip round the brown horse's head and whistled a merry tune.

"Hello! What's up now?"

Some one was standing at the turn of the road ahead, waving to him; a child; a little girl in cloak and hood, her red-mittened hands gesticulating wildly.

"We're a-comin', we're a-comin'!" said Calvin Parks. "Git there just the very minute we git there, you see if we don't. Why, Mittie May! you don't mean to tell me this is you?"

"Oh! yes, please!" cried the child. "Oh! please will you come and see Miss Fidely? oh! please will you?"

"There! there! little un; why, you're all out of breath. Been runnin', have ye?"

"Oh, yes!" panted Mittie May. "I ran all the way, for fear I wouldn't get here before you went by. Will you come and see Miss Fidely, Mr. Candy Man?"

"Well!" said Calvin, "that depends, little gal. There's three p'ints I'd like to consider in this connection and as touchin' this matter, as old parson used to say. First, is Miss Fidely good-lookin' and agreeable *to* see? Second, does she anyways want to see me? Third, how far off does she live? It's gettin' on towards sundown,

and hossy and me have a good ways to go before we get our oats."

"It's not far," said the child. "And she wants to see you terrible bad. Her goods ain't come that she ordered, and the tree's all up, and the boys and girls all comin' to-morrow, and no candy. And I told her about you, and how you mostly came along this road Wednesdays, and she said run and catch you if I could, and I run!"

"I should say you did!" said Calvin. "Now you hop right in here with me, little gal! Hopsy upsy — there she comes! Let me tuck you in good — so! now you tell me which way to go, and hossy and me'll git there. That's a fair division, ain't it?"

Still panting, the child pointed down a narrow cross-road, on which at some distance stood a solitary house.

"That the house?" asked Calvin. Mittie May nodded.

"I hope Miss Fidely ain't large for her size," said Calvin; "she might fit raythe snug if she was."

It was a tiny house, gray and weather-beaten; but the windows were trim with white curtains and gay with flowers; on the stone wall a row of milk-pans flashed back the afternoon sun; the whole air of the place was cheerful and friendly.

"I expect Miss Fidely's all right!" said Calvin with emphasis. "Smart woman, to judge by the looks of her pans, and there's nothing better to go by as I know of. Them's as bright as Miss Hands's, and more than that I can't say. Now you hop out, Mittie May, and ask her will she step out and see the goods, or shall I bring in any special line?"

The child stared. "She can't come out!" she said. "Miss Fidely can't walk."

"Can't walk!" repeated Calvin.

"No! and the path ain't shovelled wide

enough for her to come out. Come in and see her, please!"

His eyes very round, Calvin followed the child up the narrow path and in at the low door. Then he stopped short.

The door opened directly into a long, low room, the whole width of the house. The whitewashed walls were like snow, the bare floor was painted bright yellow, with little islands of rag carpet here and there. There were a few quaint old rush-bottomed chairs, and in one corner what looked like a child's trundle-bed, gay with a splendid sunflower quilt. These things Calvin saw afterwards; the first glance showed him only the Tree and its owner. It was a low, spreading tree, filling one end of the room completely. Strings of pop-corn festooned the branches, and flakes of cotton-wool snow were cunningly disposed here and there. Bright apples peeped from amid the green, and from every tip hung a splendid

star of tinsel or tin foil. No "boughten stuff" these; all through the year Miss Fidely patiently begged from her neighbors: from the women the tinsel on their button-cards, from the men the "silver" that wrapped their tobacco. Carefully pressed under the big Bible, they waited till Christmas, to become the glory of the Tree. The presents might not have impressed a city child much, for every one was made by Miss Fidely herself; the aprons, the mittens, the cotton-flannel rabbits and bottle-dolls for the tiny ones, the lace-trimmed sachets and bows for the older girls. Mittie May, all forgetful of marble palaces, stole one glance of delighted awe, and then remembered her manners.

"Here's the Candy Man, Miss Fidely!" she said.

Miss Fidely turned quickly; she had been tying an apple to one of the lower branches with scarlet worsted.

"Pleased to meet you!" she said. "Do take a seat, won't you? I can't rise, myself, so you must excuse me!"

Miss Fidely sat in a thing like a child's go-cart on four wheels. Her little withered feet clad in soft leather moccasins peeped out from under her scant brown calico skirt. They could never have supported the strong square body and powerful head, Calvin thought; she must have spent her life in that cart; and at the thought a mist came over his brown eyes. But he took the hard brown hand that was held out to him, and shook it cordially.

"I am real pleased to make your acquaintance!" he said. "Nice weather we're havin'; a mite cold, but 'tis more seasonable that way, to my thinkin'."

"I was so afraid Mittie May wouldn't catch you!" Miss Fidely went on. "I s'pose she's told you my misfortune, sir. I order my candy from a firm in Tupham

Centre; and I had a letter this mornin' statin' that they had burned up and lost all their stock, and couldn't fill any orders. 'Twas too late to order elsewhere, and I couldn't make enough for all hands — thirty children I expect to-morrow, and some of 'em comin' from nine or ten miles away — and what to do I didn't know; when all of a sudden Mittie May thought of you. She lives on the next ro'd, not fur from here, Mittie doos, and she helps me get the tree ready; don't you, Mittie May? I don't know what I should do without her, I'm sure."

She smiled at Mittie May, who glowed with pride and pleasure. Calvin thought he had seen only one smile brighter than Miss Fidely's.

" It did seem real providential," she went on, " if only she could catch you, and I'm more than pleased she did. Here's my bags all ready," she pointed to a neat

pile that lay on a table beside her; "and if you've got the goods to fill 'em, I guess we sha'n't need to do much bargainin'. I've got the money ready too."

"I guess that's all right!" said Calvin, rising. "I'll bring my stock right in, what's left of it, and you can take your pick. I've sold the heft of it, but yet there's a plenty still to fill them bags twice't over."

"Mittie May, it's time for you to go," said Miss Fidely. "Your Ma'll be lookin' for you to help get supper. Mebbe you can run over to-night to hang the bags, or first thing in the morning."

"I'll hang the bags!" said Calvin Parks.

"Oh!" said Miss Fidely. "You're real kind, but that's too much to ask, isn't it?"

"I guess not!" said Calvin. "I guess I'd rather trim a Christmas Tree than eat my supper any day in the week. You run along, Mittie May; I'll tend to this."

The rose and violet were deepening over the snow-fields, and stars were piercing the golden veil of sunset. Calvin filled the brown horse's nose-bag and hung it over his head, and covered him carefully with the buffalo robe.

"You rest easy a spell, hossy!" he said. "This is trade, you know. Christmas Eve, you can't expect to get to bed real early."

Hossy shook himself, whinnied "All right!" and addressed himself to his supper. Calvin pulled out one drawer after another, studying their contents with frowning anxiety. "She's goin' to have the best there is!" he said. "There's a look in that lady's eyes that puts me in mind of Miss Hands; and take that with her bein' afflicted and all — I guess we'll give her a good set-off, hossy. I guess — that — is — what we'll do!"

While he spoke, he was piling box upon

box, jar upon jar, holding the pile firm with his chin. Entering the house again, he deposited them carefully on the table, and proceeded to spread them out.

"There!" he said. "I guess you'll find what you want here. All the candies, stick, drop and fancy; tutti-frutti and pepsin chewing-gum, chocolate creams and marshmallow goods. You didn't say what amount you was calc'latin' to lay out — ?"

Miss Fidely looked round her carefully. "I didn't care to say before the little gal!" she said. "My neighbors is real careful of me, and they grudge my spendin' so much money. I tell 'em it's my circus and fair and sociable and spring bunnet all in one. There! I calc'late to spend five dollars, and I've got it to spend. I'm a stranger to you, sir, and mebbe you'd like to see it before we go any further."

"I guess not!" said Calvin Parks. "I guess I know a straight stick when I see

one — " his eyes fell on the twisted outlines covered by the brown calico skirt, and he finished his sentence in silence. " Your one comfort," he said, " is that it ain't likely the Lord made another fool like you when he see the way you'd act."

" That's a handsome sum of money," he added aloud. " You'll get a handsome set-out for it."

" I've got no one belongin' to me," said the lame woman simply; " and I'm far from church privileges. I never touch my burial money, but I do feel that I have a right to this. Well! you have got elegant goods, I must say. Now we'll get down to business, if agreeable to you."

It was most agreeable to Calvin Parks, and he made it so to Miss Fidely. She must taste every variety of sugar-plum, so that she could know what she was giving.

" That's trade!" he said, when she remonstrated. " That's straight trade; no

samples, no buyers! You try this lemon taffy! I do regard it as extry. These goods is all pure sugar, every mite; I know the man as made 'em, and helped some in the makin'. Some of the pineapple sticks? That's a lovely candy to my mind. I helped make these only yesterday morning. You try a morsel; here's a broken stick!"

"Why, I never had no such candy as this before!" cried Miss Fidely, crunching the white and scarlet stick. "Why, 'tis as different from the goods I've bought before as new-laid eggs is from store. I guess you'll have a steady customer from now on, as many Christmases as I have to live."

"That so?" said Calvin. "Well, I aim to give satisfaction, and so does the man who makes for me. All pure sugar; no glucose, terry alby, nor none of them things, destroyin' folks's stomachs. Nothin' else than poison, some of the stuff you'll find

in the market is; but good sugar and good flavorin' is wholesome, I claim, taken moderate, you know, and the system craves it, or so appears to do. Say we commence to fill the bags now, what? And so you toll in the neighborin' children and give 'em a Christmas Tree! Now that's a pleasant thing to do; I don't know as ever I heard of a pleasanter."

Miss Fidely glowed again, and again she looked like Mary Sands. "I've been doin' it for ten years now," she said, "and shall, I expect, as long as the Lord thinks I'm best off here. You see, not havin' the use of my limbs, I can't go much; and I do love children, and they've got the habit of runnin' in here for a cooky or a story or like that. This ain't a wealthy neighborhood; the soil's rather poor; folks has moved away; I scarcely know how it is, but yet 'tis so. And, too, they haven't had the habit of makin' of Christmas same

as they do in most places. Some ten year ago I spent a winter in the city. There was a man thought he could cure me of my lameness, or made me think so; and though I was old enough to know better, I give in, and went and let him try. Well, I didn't get any help that way, but I got an amazin' deal other ways. There was a Tree to the hospital where I was, and they carried me in to see it; and I said that minute of time, 'There shan't any child round our way go without a Tree after this, as long as I live!' I says. I count it a great mercy that I've been able to keep that promise. I begin Near Year's day to make my presents — doin' it evenin's and odd times, you know, and 'tis my child's play all the year through till Christmas comes again. They ask me sometimes if I ain't lonesome; any one can't be lonesome, I tell 'em, while they're makin' Christmas presents."

"You don't live all sole alone?" asked Calvin Parks.

"Certin I do! I've no kin of my own, and them as wished to marry me warn't more than what I had time to say no to," she laughed gleefully; "and I wouldn't be bothered with no stranger messin' round. I'm used to myself, you see, but I don't know as any person else could get along with me real well, come to stay right along. I expect I'm as caniptious as an old hen. The neighbors is real good; any one couldn't ask for better help than they be when I need help, but 'tis seldom I do. I'm strong and well, and everything is handy by, as you may say. Only when it comes Christmas, I can't fetch in the tree nor yet mount up to trim the upper branches, and then I have to call on some one. My! ain't you smart? you've got all them bags hung while I've been talkin'. They do look pretty, don't they?"

"They look handsome!" Calvin assented warmly, "they certinly do. But if you'll excuse me takin' a liberty, I think there's just one extry touch this tree needs, and with your permission I'm goin' to put it on. Excuse me a half a minute!"

He ran out, and soon returned beaming with pleasure and good will, his hands full of small tissue paper parcels.

"I had these all wropped up separate," he said, "'cause they're fraygile. How many children did you say there was? Thirty? Well, if that ain't a nice fit! Here's three dozen left; and not one of them is goin' any further to-night."

He unwrapped the parcels, and displayed to Miss Fidely's wondering eyes dogs, lions, camels, rabbits, all sparkling in barley sugar, all glittering in the sunset light. The lame woman clasped her hands, and her eyes shone.

"Oh!" she cried. "I see the like of

them in the hospital; I never see them before or since. I can't believe it's true. Oh! I do believe the Lord sent you, sir!"

"I believe so too!" said Calvin Parks.

Suddenly Miss Fidely's face changed.

"My goodness!" she cried. "I never thought, and I know you never either. I can't take them, sir! I've spent all my money, and more too, I expect, for I know well you give me extry measure in some of them candies. But I'm just as pleased at you takin' the pains to bring 'em in, and the children haven't seen 'em, so there's no harm."

"Now what a way that is to talk!" said Calvin, "for a lady as sensible as you be. Didn't I know you had laid out your money, and a good sum, too? Did you think you was the only person that liked to do a little something for the children Christmas time? Now ain't that a sight! Them's my

present to Mittie May and her friends, that's all. Now see me hang 'em on!"

He turned hastily to the tree, for Miss Fidely was crying, and Calvin did not know what the mischief got into women-folks to make 'em act that way. Drawing a ball of pink string from his pocket, he proceeded to hang his menagerie, talking the while.

"I've had quite a time to-day. Any one sees a good deal of human natur' drivin' a candy route, yes sir, I would say ma'am! Hossy and me has come a good ways to-day, and seen 'most all kinds. Are you acquainted any with a woman name of Weazle, down the ro'd about four mile from here? Ain't? Well, she's a case, I tell you. Long skinny kind of woman, looks like she'd bleed sour milk — skim — if she scratched her finger. She made up her mind I was goin' to cheat her, and she warn't goin' to be cheated, not she. Quite a circus we had.

"'How much is them marshmallers?' she says.

"'Twenty cents a pound,' I says.

"'It's too much!' she says.

"'Is that so?' I says.

"'It's scandalous!' she says.

"'I want to know!' I says.

"'You won't sell none at that price!' she says.

"'Is that a fact?' I says.

"'Well, what'll you take for em?' she says.

"'Twenty cents a pound,' I says.

"'I tell you it's too much!' she says.

"'I know it's too much for you,' I says, 'and so is the marshmallows. They might give you the dyspepsy!' I says. 'Gitty up, hossy!' and I druv off and left her standin' there with her mouth open. There! now they're all up and I must be ramblin' along, or I sha'n't get nowheres by the end of time."

Miss Fidely had dried her eyes, but the look she fixed on Calvin disturbed him almost as much as the tears.

"I won't say nothin' more," she said; "I see the kind you are; but I wish you could come in tomorrow and see the children. I expect their faces will be a sight, when they see them elegant presents; yes, sir, I do! I expect you'd never forget this Christmas, as I'm certin I never shall. Oh!" she cried with a sudden outburst. "You good man, I hope you'll get your heart's desire, whatever it is."

"I hope I shall!" said Calvin Parks gravely.

"And now," said Miss Fidely, brightening up, "we'll settle. If you'll just lift the lid of that old teapot standin' on the mantel-shelf, you'll find three one-dollar bills and a two. I wish 'twas a hundred!" she cried heartily.

Calvin Parks stepped to the mantelpiece and lifted the lid of the teapot.

"I guess you made a mistake this time," he said cheerily; "where'll I look next?"

Miss Fidely turned very pale. "What — what do you mean?" she faltered.

Calvin handed her the teapot; it was empty.

"You forgot and put it somewheres else!" he said. "Anybody's liable to do that when they have a thing on their mind. I've done it myself time and again. How about a bureau drawer; what? We'll find it; don't you be scared!"

"No!" said Miss Fidely faintly. "No, sir! it was there. I counted it last night the last thing, and there ain't no one — my Lord! that tramp!"

"What tramp?"

"He came here this morning and asked for some breakfast. He seemed so poor and mis'able, and he told such a pitiful

story, I went out to get him a drink of milk — he must have taken it. I remember, he was standin' over there when I come in, but I never mistrusted — "

Her voice failed, and she covered her eyes with her hands. Calvin Parks cast a rapid glance behind him, and ascertaining the position of the door, began to edge quietly toward it.

"Don't you fret!" he said soothingly. "I shall be round this way again some time; mebbe you'll find it some place when you least expect. I've known such things to happen, oftentimes."

"No! no!" cried the cripple, her distress increasing momentarily. "It's gone, sir! The look in that man's face comes back to me, and I know now what it meant. Oh! he must have a hard heart, to rob a cripple woman of her one pleasure, and on Christmas Eve!"

She flung her hands apart with a wild

gesture, but the next moment controlled herself and spoke quietly but rapidly. "I am ashamed to trouble you, sir, but if you'll take down the bags I'll empt 'em as careful as I can. I wouldn't trouble you if I could help myself."

"I — I'm afraid I can't stop!" muttered Calvin; and he hung his head as he spoke, for a dry voice was saying in his ear, "Put this straight to yourself; are you running a candy route or an orphan asylum?"

"Oh! if Mittie May would only come!" cried the lame woman. "I'll *have* to trouble you, sir; it won't take you long."

Calvin mumbled something about calling again.

"No!" cried Miss Fidely. "There'd be no use in your calling again; that's all I can save in a year, and there's no more —"

She stopped short, and the blood rushed into her thin face.

"No!" she said after a pause. "I can't take the burial money, even for the children. Oh! you kind, good man, take down the bags, and take your candy back!"

"I've got to see to my hoss!" cried Calvin irritably. "Hear him hollerin'? Jest wait a half a minute —" he sneaked out of the door, closed it carefully behind him, and bolted for his sleigh. He snatched the nose-bag from Hossy's nose, the robe from his back; clambering hastily in, he cast a guilty glance around him, and saw — Mittie May, standing a few paces off, staring at him round-eyed.

"Here!" he cried. "You tell her I ain't feelin' real well, and I've got to get home. Tell her — tell her my name's Santy Claus, and my address is the North Pole. And — look here! tell her Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, and the same to you! Gitty up, hossy! gitty up!"

and laying his whip over the astonished flanks of the brown horse, Calvin Parks fled down the road as if Blücher and the Prussians were after him.

CHAPTER XIII

MERRY CHRISTMAS

"BUT that ain't the end of the story, Miss Hands!" said Calvin Parks, after telling as much as he thought proper of the foregoing events. "That ain't the end. This mornin' I stopped down along a piece to wish Merry Christmas to Aaron Tarbox's folks, and I left hossy standin' while I ran into the house. I stayed longer than I intended — you know how 'tis when there's children hangin' round — and when I come out, you may call me mate to a mud-scow if there warn't a feller with his head and shoulders clear inside the back of my cart. I can't tell you how, but some way of it, it come over me in a flash who the feller was. I don't know as ever I moved quicker in my life. I had him by the scruff

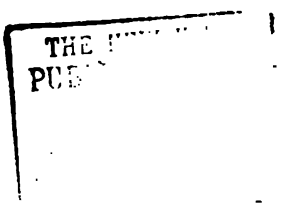
of his neck and the slack of his pants, and out of that and standin' on his head in a snow-drift before he could have winked more than once, certin.

"'Have you got three ones and a two,' I says, 'belongin' to a lady as sits in a cart, 'bout four mile from here? 'cause if you have, and was keepin' them for the owner, I'll save you the trouble,' I says. He couldn't answer real well, his head bein' in the drift, so I went through his pockets, and sure enough there they was, three ones and a two, just as she said."

"My goodness!" cried Mary Sands. "What did you do?"

"Well, I give him his Christmas present, a good solid one, that'll last him a sight longer than the money would have, and then I hove him back into the drift to cool off a spell, — he was some warm, and so was I, — and come along. So now I've got the money, and that lady can rest easy

"'THEN I HOVE HIM BACK INTO THE DRIFT TO COOL OFF A SPELL.'"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in her mind; only I've got to let her know. Now, Miss Hands, I'm no kind of a hand at writin' letters; I've been studyin' all the way along the ro'd how to tell that lady that she ain't owin' me a cent; and I don't know as I've hit it off real good."

He felt in his pockets, and produced a scrap of paper; with an anxious eye on Mary Sands, he read aloud as follows.

"DEAR MA'AM; — I got that money and give the feller one instead, so no more and received payment from yours respy C. Parks."

"How's that, Miss Hands? Will it do, think?"

Mary's eyes twinkled. "It's short and sweet, Mr. Parks," she said; "it tells the story, certin, though I don't doubt but she'd be pleased to hear more from you."

"That's all I've got to say!" said Calvin

simply; "I'm glad to get it off my mind. How's the boys this morning?"

"That's why I made an errand out here before you went into the house!" said Mary Sands.

They were sitting in the harness-room, she in the chair, he on the bucket. There was a fire in the stove, and the place was full of the pleasant smell of warm leather. Their speech was punctuated by the stamping and neighing of the brown horse, the young colt, the old horse of all, the mare, and Old John, in the stable adjoining.

Mary Sands' hazel eyes were full of a half-humorous anxiety.

"I wanted to talk to you a little about Cousins!" she said. "They've been actin' real strange the past week, ever since you was here last. Honest, I don't believe they've thought of one single thing besides each other. Werryin' and frettin' and watchin' — I'm 'most worn

out with 'em. There! if it warn't so comical I should cry, and if it warn't so pitiful I should laugh. That's just the way I feel about it, Mr. Parks."

"Sho!" said Calvin sympathetically. "I don't wonder at it, Miss Hands, not a mite. They haven't got round to speakin' to each other yet, I s'pose?"

Mary shook her head. "No!" she said. "They want to, I'm sure of that, but yet neither one of 'em will speak first. Such foolishness I never did see. Now take yesterday! Cousin Sam went to town, and Cousin Sim werried every single minute he was gone. The mare was skittish, and the harness might break, and he might meet the cars, and I don't know what all. If he called me off my work once he did a dozen times, till I thought I should fly. By the time Cousin Sam got back he was all worn out, and soon as he heard him safe in the house he dropped off asleep in his

chair. Well! then 'twas all to do over again with Cousin Sam. How had Simeon been, and what had he been doin' while he was gone, and didn't I think he had a bad color at breakfast? Then Cousin Sim begun to snore, and Cousin Sam would have it that 'twarn't natural snorin', and he must be in a catamouse condition."

"What did he mean by that?" asked Calvin.

"That's what he said!" Mary replied. "It's a medical term, but I don't know as he got it just right. It means sleepin' kind of heavy and unhealthy, I understand. 'Well,' I says, 'Cousin Sam, just you step here and look at Cousin Sim!' So he did, and see him sound asleep with his mouth open, lookin' peaceful as a fish. He stood and looked at him a spell, and I see his mouth begin to work. 'There's nothin' catamouse about that sleep, Cousin!' I says. 'There couldn't a baby sleep easier

than what he is.' He shakes his head mournful. 'Simeon's aged terrible since Ma went,' he says. He stood there lookin' at him a spell longer, and then he give a kind of groan and went back to his own chair.

"Now, Mr. Parks, it's time this foolishness was put a stop to."

"That's right!" said Calvin Parks. "That's so, Miss Hands. I believe you've got a plan to stop it, too."

"I have!" said Mary Sands. "I've been studyin' it out while I was settin' here waitin' for you. This is Christmas Day, Mr. Parks; and if you'll help me, I believe we can bring it about to-day. Will you?"

"Will I?" said Calvin Parks. "Will a dog bark?"

"Merry Christmas, Sam!" said Calvin Parks.

"Same to you, Calvin, same to you!"

said Mr. Sam. "Come in! come in! Shet the door after you, will ye?"

Calvin shut the door into the entry. Mr. Sam glanced about him uneasily.

"You might shet the other too, if you don't mind!" he said. "Thank ye! Have you seen Simeon this mornin', Calvin?"

"Not yet," said Calvin. "I come straight in the front door and in here. What's the matter? Ain't he all right?"

"Simeon is failin'!" replied Mr. Sam. "He's failin' right along, Calvin. I expect this is the last Christmas he'll see on earth. I—I was down street yesterday," he added, after a solemn pause, "and it occurred to me he hadn't had a new pair of slippers for a dog's age. I thought I'd get a pair, and mebbe you'd give 'em to him."

"Mebbe I'd stand on my head!" retorted Calvin. "Give 'em to him yourself, you old catnip!"

"No! no, Calvin! no! no! I'd ruther

you would!" said Mr. Sam anxiously. "I'd take it real friendly if you would, sir!"

"Well, we'll see!" said Calvin. "Hello! dressed up for Christmas, be ye?"

Mr. Sam looked down in some embarrassment. His red flannel waistcoat was replaced by a black one.

"We never made so much of Christmas as some," he said; "but yet Ma allers had us dress up for Christmas dinner, and I thought this seemed a mite more dress, you understand, Calvin. What say?"

"Looks first-rate!" said Calvin cheerfully. "You don't look a mite worse than you did before, as I see. Now I guess I'll step in and pass the time of day with Sim."

"Hold on jest a minute!" said Mr. Sam anxiously. "Hold on jest a half a minute, Cal! That ain't all I was wishful to say to you. Have you — I would say —

have you approached that subject we was speakin' of a while back, to Cousin?"

"What subject?" said Calvin Parks doggedly.

"Don't be cantankerous, Calvin! now don't!" said Mr. Sam. "It's Christmas Day. The subject of matrimony, you know."

"I have!" said Calvin. "She won't look at him! She wouldn't look at him if the only other man in the world was Job Toothaker's scarecrow, that scared the seeds under ground so they never came up. There's your answer!"

"Dear me sirs!" cried Mr. Sam, wringing his hands. "Dear me sirs! I don't know what's goin' to become of us, Calvin, I reelly don't!"

"Well!" said Calvin; "I guess likely you'll werry through the day, Sam. I know what's goin' to become of me; I'm goin' in to see Sim."

"Take the slippers, won't ye, Calvin?" cried Mr. Sam. "Tell him to wear 'em and save his boots. He's allers ben terrible hard on shoe-leather, Simeon has."

Calvin took the slippers with a grunt, and went into the next room, closing the door after him.

"Merry Christmas!" he cried. "How are you, Sim?"

"I'm obliged to you, Calvin; I am slim!" replied Mr. Sim. "I am unusual slim, sir. Take a seat, won't you?"

"I said Merry Christmas!" Calvin remarked gruffly. "Can't you speak up in the way of the season? Come, buck up, old timothy-grass! Merry Christmas!"

"Merry Christmas!" echoed Mr. Sim meekly; "though if your laigs was as bad as mine, Calvin, you might think different. If I get through this winter — what you got there?"

"Slippers!" said Calvin. "Christmas

present from Sam. Wants you to wear 'em and save shoe-leather."

"The failin's of Sam'l's mind," said Mr. Sim gravely, "are growin' on him ekal to those of his body. Shoe-leather! when I ain't stepped foot outside the door since Ma died. But they are handsome, certin; you may thank him for me, Calvin."

"May!" said Calvin. "That's a sweet privilege, no two ways about that. Hello! what in Tunkett — " he stopped, abruptly, staring. "Splice my halyards if you haven't got a red one!" Mr. Sim glanced down with shy pride at his waistcoat.

"Christmas Day, you know, Calvin!" he said. "We allers made some little change in our dress, sir, for Christmas dinner. I thought 'twould please Ma, and Cousin, and — and the other one, too!" he added, with a furtive glance toward the door.

"Well, I am blowed!" said Calvin Parks

plaintively. "I certinly am this time. You boys is too much for me."

Mr. Sim coughed modestly, and cast another coy glance at the red waistcoat. "How is poor Sam'l this mornin', Calvin?" he asked mournfully. "Do you find him changed much of any?"

"I do not!" said Calvin. "He's just about as handsome, and just about as takin' as he was last time, fur as I see."

"Ah!" sighed Mr. Sim. "You don't see below the surface, Cal."

"Nor don't wish to!" retorted Calvin. "That's quite sufficient for me."

"I've got the feelin' in my bones," Mr. Sim went on, "that somethin' is goin' to happen to Sam'l, Calvin. He's that reckless, sir, I look 'most any day to see him brought home a mangled remain. Call it a warnin', or what you will, I believe it's comin'. I hear him cuttin' round them

corners, and reshin' in and out the yard with them wild hosses, — "

"Wild hosses!" repeated Calvin Parks. "Sim Sill, you feel in your pants pocket, won't you, and see if you can't scare up some wits, just a mite. Old John is thirty if he's a day, and the old hoss of all — well, nobody knows how old he is, beyond that he'll never see forty again. The mare has been here ever since I can remember, or pretty nigh, and your Ma bought the young colt before ever I went to sea. Now talk about wild hosses!"

"It ain't their age, Cal, it's their natur'!" responded Mr. Sim with dignity. "That mare, sir, has never ben stiddy, nor yet will she ever so be, in my opinion."

"Well!" said Calvin Parks. "I'll tell him next time he goes to market, tie her to the well-sweep and walk; you don't cal'late his legs would up and run away with him,

do ye? Now I'm goin' to help Miss Hands dish up dinner."

"Hold on, Calvin! hold on jest a minute!" cried Mr. Sim anxiously. "I've got a little present I'd like for you to give Sam'l from me, sir. It's —" he got up, shuffled across the room, and opened a cupboard door. "It's something he's allers coveted."

Fumbling in a box, he took out an ancient seal of red carnelian, and rubbed it lovingly on his coat-sleeve.

"Belonged to Uncle Sim Penny," he said. "Ma give it to me, on accounts of me bein' his name-son; I don't know as ever I've used it, or likely to, and Sam'l has always coveted it. You give that to Sam'l, Calvin, will you?"

"Oh molasses!" said Calvin impatiently. "Give it to him yourself, you ridic'lous old object!"

"No! no, Calvin! no, no, sir!" cried

Mr. Sim piteously. "We don't speak, you know; we — we've lost the habit of it, and we're too old to ketch holt of it again. You give it to him, Cal, like a good feller! And — and there's another thing, Calvin. Did you have any dealin's with Cousin about what we was speakin' of some time along back, in regards to Sam'l?"

"I did!" said Calvin Parks.

"Well — well, Cal, what did she say?" Mr. Sim leaned forward anxiously. "Was she anyways favorable, sir?"

"She was not!" replied Calvin. "She give me to understand — not in so many words, but that was the sense of it, — that she'd full as soon marry a cucumber-wood pump as him, or you either. So there you have it!"

"Dear me!" cried Mr. Sim; and he wrung his hands with the identical gesture that Mr. Sam had made. "Dear me sirs! what is to become of us, Calvin?"

"Dinner is ready, Cousin Sim!" said Mary Sands, putting her head in at the door. "Cousin Sam, dinner's ready! Merry Christmas to you, Mr. Parks, and pleased to see you!"

CHAPTER XIV

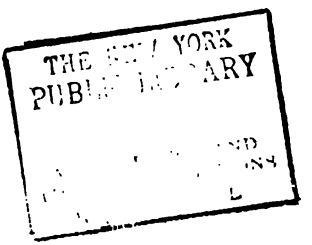
AT LAST!

MR. SIM shuffled in from one door, Mr. Sam from the other. As each raised his eyes to look at the table, he saw the figure opposite; both stopped short, and the two pairs of little gray eyes glared, one at a black waistcoat, the other at a red.

"Take your seats, Cousins, please!" said Mary Sands, quickly. "Mr. Parks, if you'll set opposite me — that's it! The Lord make us thankful, Cousins and Mr. Parks, this Christmas Day, and mindful of the wants of others, amen! You said you didn't mind carvin', Mr. Parks, so I've give you the turkey."

The four gray eyes, releasing the waistcoat buttons opposite, glanced furtively over the table, and opened wide. Never

MARY SANDS.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had the Sill farm seen a Christmas dinner like this. "Ma" had liked a good set-out, but she aimed to be saving, holidays and all days. They always had a turkey, but it was apt to be the smallest hen in the flock, and the rest was to match. But here, — here was the Big Young Gobbler, the pride and glory of the poultry yard, no longer ruffling it in black and red, but shining in rich golden brown, with strings of nut-brown sausages about his portly breast. Here was cranberry sauce, not in a bowl, but moulded in the wheat-sheaf mould, and glowing like the Great Carbuncle. Here was an Alp of potato, a golden mountain of squash, onions glimmering translucent like moonstones, the jewels of the winter feast, celery tossing pale-green plumes — good gracious! celery enough for a hotel, Mr. Sam thought; here beside each plate was a roll — was this bread, Mr. Sim wondered, twisted into a knot and shining "like

artificial?" and on each roll a spray of scarlet geranium with its round green leaf. And what — *what* was that in the middle of the table? The twins forgot the waistcoats; forgot the waste too, forgot even each other, and stared with all their eyes. A castle! a real castle, towers and battlements, moat and drawbridge, all complete, all sparkling in crystal sugar. From the topmost turret a tiny pennon floating; in the gateway a knight on horseback, nearly as large as the pennon, with fairy lance couched. It was the triumph of Mr. Ivory Cheeseman's life.

"You take that to your lady friend," he said, "and say the man as made it wishes her well, and you too, friend Parks, you too!"

Mary Sands was gazing at it with delighted eyes.

"Did you ever, Cousins?" she said. "Now *did* you ever see anything so hand-

some as that? It's a Christmas present from Mr. Parks, and it beats any present ever I had in my life. I declare, this *is* a Christmas, isn't it, Cousins? and look at you both dressed up to the nines, and lookin' real — " she caught Calvin's eye over the turkey, and faltered, — " real nice, I'm sure! And each one of you changin' his vest for Christmas! I'm sure it's real smart of you. Cousin Sim's got on his new slippers, Cousin Sam! Cousin Sim, you see Cousin Sam's got the seal on, and don't it look elegant? Why, I'm just as proud of you both! Now you want to make a good dinner, Mr. Parks and Cousins, or I shall think it *isn't* good, and I own I've done my best."

" Good!" said Calvin Parks, as he handed a solid ivory slab to Mr. Sim; " if there's a better dinner than this in the State of Maine, the folks wouldn't get over it, I expect. I've seen dinners served from the

Roostick down to New Orleans, and I never see the ekal of this for style nor quality."

"I'm sure you are more than kind to say so!" said Mary Sands. "Dear me! times like this, any one thinks of days past and gone, don't they? You must have had real good times Christmas, when you was boys together, Mr. Parks, Cousins and you together."

"Well, I guess!" said Calvin Parks. "Sam, do you rec'lect one time I come over to spend Christmas Day with you when we was little shavers about ten year old, and we left the pig-pen gate open, and the pigs got all over the place? Gorry! do you rec'lect the back door stood open, and nothin' to it but old Marm Sow must projick right into the kitchen where your Ma was gettin' dinner? Haw! haw! do you rec'lect that?"

"He! he!" piped Mr. Sam; "I guess I do! and Ma up and basted her hide with

hot gravy! My Juniper, how she hollered!"

Mr. Sim fixed Mary Sands with a glittering eye. "You tell him 'twarn't gravy, t'was puddin' sauce!" he said.

"Cousin Sam, Cousin Sim says 'twas puddin' sauce!" said Mary Sands cheerfully.

"Think likely 'twas!" said Mr. Sam. "Tell him he's right for once, and put that down on his little slate."

"Then another time," Calvin went on; "another morsel, Miss Hands? just a scrap? can't? now ain't that a sight! I can, just as easy — watch me now! I rec'lect well, that Methody parson was here with his boy. What was his name? Lihu, was it, or 'Liphalet?"

"'Liphalet!" said Mr. Sim, a faint twinkle coming into his dim eyes. "'Liphalet Pinky!"

"'Liphalet Pinky! that's it!" Calvin

laid down his knife and fork to slap his thigh. "Jerusalem crickets! how we did play it on that unfort'nate youngster! Miss Hands, you see Sim settin' there, sober as a judge; you'd think he'd been like that all his life now, wouldn't you? You'd never think he'd get an unfort'nate boy into the bucket and h'ist him up and down the well till he was e'enamost scairt to death, would you now?"

"I certin should not!" cried Mary Sands gleefully. "Why, Cousin Sim!"

"And he hollerin' all the time, 'Lemme out! I'll tell Pa on you, and he'll call down the wrath to come! You lemme out!' and then we'd slack on the old sweep and down he'd go again — haw! haw!"

"He! he!" cackled Mr. Sim, rubbing his little withered hands. "I can see the tossel on his cap now, bobbin' up and down, and his little pickéd nose under it — he! he!"

"Ho! ho!" chimed in Mr. Sam suddenly. "And I can see you — I mean, tell him I can see *him* bobbin' up and down on Ma's knee when she spanked him for it."

"That's too long to say," said Mary Sands placidly; "think likely he heard it, didn't you, Cousin Sim?"

"Tell him he got jest as good!" retorted Mr. Sim.

"Cousin Sam, Cousin Sim says you got it just as good!" said Mary. "Now, Mr. Parks, if you're a mind to carry the turkey out while I bring in the pies — if nobody'll have any more, that is to say!"

"Well!" said Calvin Parks, rising and lifting the huge platter; "if all had eat what I have, there'd be nothin' *to* carry out, that's all I have to say. After you, Miss Hands!"

He closed the pantry door cautiously after him.

" How do you think it's goin' ? " he asked eagerly.

" Splendid ! " cried Mary Sands under her breath. " It's goin' splendid ! They've looked at each other much as four or five times, and twice they only just stopped in time or they'd have spoke to each other. I saw Cousin Sam catch his breath and fairly choke the words back. Keep right on as you are, Mr. Parks, and we'll have 'em talkin' in another hour, see if we don't ! "

The pies — such pies ! — had come and gone. With furtive blinks, Mr. Sam had unbuttoned the lower buttons of a black, Mr. Sim of a red waistcoat; they leaned back in their chairs, their sharp little features relaxed, and they stirred their coffee with the air of men at peace with the world.

Calvin Parks bent over his cup with an attentive look.

"Boys," he said pensively, "warn't this your Ma's cup?"

The twins started, and looked at the dark blue cup with gold on the handle.

"It was so!" said Mr. Sam.

"Certin!" said Mr. Sim.

"I thought so!" said Calvin. "Miss Hands, you ought to have this cup by rights; and yet I'm pleased to have it, for I thought a sight of the boys' Ma, and she knowed it. She was always good to me, if she did call me a rover; always good to me she was, from the time I was knee high to a grasshopper. The boys was bigger than me in those days, Miss Hands; I dono as you'd think it now, but so it was. They stopped growin' at the same time; didn't you, boys? Along about fourteen year old, warn't it? You've been just the same height since then, haven't ye?"

"I'm a mite the tallest!" said Mr. Sam, raising his head.

"Tell him it ain't so!" piped Mr. Sim. "Tell him I am!"

"Sho!" said Calvin Parks. "I don't believe either one of you has the least idee, reelly. If there *was* any difference, I should say Sim was just a shade the tallest; how does it look it to you, Miss Hands?"

"I think Cousin Sam is!" replied Mary Sands promptly.

"You don't say!" said Calvin. "Now that's queer! Looks to me — well! I say, let's find out! 'Tis easy done. Come on into the front room, boys, and stand back to back, and I'll measure ye!"

The front room was open in honor of Christmas Day; "Ma's" best parlor, with its cross-stitch embroideries, its mourning pictures, its rigid black horse-hair chairs and sofas. Above the mantelpiece, with its tall vases of waving pampas grass, "Ma" herself gazed down from a portentous gold frame with a quelling glance; "Pa"

hung beside her, a meek young man with a feeble smile of apology; one could understand that he had backed out of existence as soon as might be. In one corner stood a tall dim mirror, and before it a little double chair of quaint shape, evidently made for two children.

"Sho!" said Calvin Parks. "How did that chair come here? Why, I haven't seen that for forty year. Jerusalem! that takes me back — why, Sim and Sam, it seems only yesterday, the first time ever I set foot in this room, and there sat you two in that little chair gogglin' at me, and your Ma standin' beside you. Say, boys, that kind of takes holt of me! your Ma was a good woman, if she did know her own mind. Well, we're all poor creatur's. Here! you stand back to back in front of the glass, and then I can see — hold your chins up — shoulders back; shoulders *back*, Sim! don't scrooch down that way; you ain't really

a crab, you know — head up, Sam! there! now shut your eyes; any one can stand straighter with their eyes shut; now, — "

A voice spoke from the doorway; a woman's voice, full and clear, with a sharp ring of decision.

"Now you love each other pretty, right away, or I'll take the back of the hair-brush to you both!"

"*Ma!*" cried the twins; and they fell on their knees beside the little chair.

"I told 'em shut their eyes, and then slipped out!" said Calvin Parks. "They never missed me. Jerusalem! Miss Hands, if you'll excuse the expression, how did you manage it? you got her tone to the life, I tell you."

"I always had the trick of followin' a voice," said Mary Sands modestly. "And I remembered Cousin Lucindy's to Con-

ference, for she used to speak an amazin' deal. Oh! Mr. Parks, listen! do listen to them two poor old creatur's!"

They listened. From the front room came a babble of talk, two voices flowing together in a stream, pauseless, inseparable; so fast the stream flowed, there seemed no time for breathing. But now, as the conspirators listened, dish-cloth in hand and joy in their hearts, the voices ceased for a moment, and then, with one consent, broke out into quavering, squeaking, piping song.

"Old John Twyseed;
Old John Twyseed;
Biled his corn,
As sure's you're born,
And come to borrow my seed.

"Old John Twyseed,
Bought a pound o' rye seed;
Paid a cent,
And warn't content,
But thought 'twas awful high seed.

"Old John Twyseed,
Sold his neighbor dry seed;
Didn't sprout;
Says he 'Git out!
I thought 'twas extry spry seed!'"

CHAPTER XV

BY WAY OF CONTRAST

"I WISH'T you could stay to supper!" said Mary Sands.

"I wish't I could!" said Calvin. "I want you to understand that right enough; and I guess you do!" he added, with a look that brought the color into Mary's wholesome brown cheek. "But they plead with me kind o' pitiful, and — honest, I'm sorry for them two women, Miss Hands. They don't seem to be real pop'lar with the neighbors — I don't know just how 'tis, but so 'tis, — and they kind o' look to me, you see. You understand how 'tis, don't you, Mary — I would say Miss Hands?"

"I expect I do, Mr. Parks!" said Mary gently, yet with some significance.

Calvin looked down at her, and his heart swelled. An immense wave of tenderness

seemed to flow from him, enfolding the little woman as she stood there, so neat and trim in her blue cashmere dress, her pretty head bent, the light playing in the waves of her pretty hair.

"For two cents and a half," Calvin Parks said silently, "I'd pick you up and carry you off this minute of time. You're my woman, and don't you forget it!" Then he spoke aloud, and his voice sounded strange in his ears.

"You and the boys," he said, "are always askin' me for stories. If — if I should come and tell you a story some day — the very first day I had a right to — that the boys warn't goin' to hear, nor anybody else but just you — would you listen to it, Miss Hands?"

Mary's head bent still lower, and she examined the hem of her apron critically. "I expect I would, Mr. Parks!" she said softly.

But when Calvin had driven off, chirrupping joyfully to the brown horse, Mary's little brown hands came together with a clasp, and she looked anxiously after him.

"If they don't get you away from me!" she said. "Oh! my good, kind, — there! *stupid* dear, if they don't get you away from me!"

"Hossy," said Calvin; "do you feel good? Do you? Speak up!"

The brown horse shook his head as the whip cracked past his ear, and whinnied reproachfully.

"Sho!" said Calvin. "You don't mean that. I know it's a mite late, but we'll get there, and you're sure of a good supper, whatever I be. But we've had us a great day, little hossy! we've had us a great day. Them two poor old mis'able lobster-claws is j'ined together, and betwixt the two they'll make a pretty fair lobster, take and

humor 'em, and kind of ease 'em along till they get used to each other again. And they ain't the only ones that's feelin' good, little hossy; no siree and the bob-cat's tail! You take them four good-lookin' legs of your'n round the Lord's earth, and if you find a happier man than little Calvin is to-night, I'll give you a straw bunnet for Easter. Put that in your — well, not exactly pipe and smoke it — say nosebag and smell it! Gitty up, you little hossy!" He flourished the whip round the head of the brown horse, who, catching the holiday spirit, flung up his heels incontinent, and broke into a canter even as his master broke into song.

"Now Renzo had a feedle,
That's what Renzo had, tiddy hi!
'Twas humped up in the meedle,
So haul the bowline, haul!
He played a tune, and the old cow died,
And the skipper and crew jumped over the side,
And swum away on the slack of the tide,
So haul the bowline, haul!"

The moon came up over the great snow-fields, and the world from ghostly white flashed into silver and ebony. The "orbéd maiden" seemed to smile on Calvin Parks as he jogged along the white road; perhaps in all her sweep of vision she may have seen few things pleasanter than this middle-aged lover.

"Looks real friendly, don't she?" said Calvin. "And no wonder! Christmas night, and a prospect like this; it's what *I* call sightly! I wish't I had my little woman along to see it with me; don't you, hossy? What say? You speak up now, when I talk to you about a lady! Where's your manners?"

The whip cracked like a pistol shot, and the brown horse flung up his heels again from sheer good will, and whinnied his excuses.

"Now you're talkin'!" said Calvin Parks. "And you'd better, little hossy. I want you

to understand right now that if you warn't the hossy you are — and if two-three other things were as they ain't — summer instead of winter, for one of 'em — it ain't ridin' I'd be takin' that little woman, no sir! I'd get her aboard the Mary Sands, and we'd go slippin' down along shore, coastwise, seein' the country slidin' past, and hear the water lip-lappin', and the wind singin' in the riggin,'— what? I tell you! there'd be a pair of vessels if ever the Lord made one and man the other.

"Sho! seein' in that paper that Cap'n Bates was leavin' the Mary and goin' aboard a tug has got me worked up, kind of. If it warn't that I had sworn off rovin' and rollin' for ever more — I tell you! Jerusalem! but I'd like to hear the Mary talkin' once more — never was a vessel had a pleasanter way of speakin' — there again they're alike, them two. Take her with all sails drawin', half a gale

o' wind blowin', and if she don't sing, that schooner, then I never heard singin,' that's all. And even in a calm, just lying rollin' on a long swell, and she'll say 'Easy does it! easy does it! breeze up soon, and Mary knows it!' and the water lip-lappin', and the sails playin' 'Isick and Josh, Isick and Josh,' — great snakes! Gitty up, hossy, or I shall take the wrong turn and drive to Bath instead of Tinkham."

Spite of moonlight and good spirits, the way was long, and it was near nine o'clock when Calvin drove in at the Widow Marlin's gateway. He whistled, a cheerful and propitiatory note, as he drove past the house to the barn.

"Presume likely they'll be put out some at me bein' late," he said; "but you shall have your supper first, hossy, don't you be afeared! They can't no more than kill me, anyway, and I don't know as they'd find it specially easy to-night."

The house was ominously silent as Calvin entered. The kitchen was empty, and he opened the door of the sitting-room, but paused on the threshold. Miss Phrony Marlin was sitting in the corner, weeping ostentatiously, with loud and prolonged sniffs. Her mother, a little withered woman like crumpled parchment, cowered witch-like over the air-tight stove, and looked at Calvin and then at her daughter, but said nothing.

"Excuse *me!*" said Calvin, stepping back. "I'll go into the kitchen. I didn't know; no bad news, I hope, Mis' Marlin?"

"She's all broke up!" said the old woman.

"So I see. Anything special happened?"

"Oh! you cruel man!" moaned Miss Phrony from the corner.

"Who?" said Calvin. "Me? Now what a way to talk! What's the matter, Miss Phrony? What have I done? Why,

I haven't been here since breakfast time."

"That's it!" said the widow. "She's ben lookin' for you all afternoon, and she had extry victuals cooked for you, and you never come."

"Now ain't that a sight!" said Calvin cheerily. "Why, I told you I'd most likely be late, don't you rec'lect I did? We've been a long ways to-day, hossy and me have. How about them victuals, now? I could eat a barn door, seem's though."

"How long was you at them Sillses?" demanded Miss Phrony, wiping her eyes elaborately. "You didn't keep *them* waitin', I'll be bound."

"Why, I took dinner with 'em," said Calvin, indulgently. "I told you I was goin' to, you know. Gorry! you wouldn't have wanted me here to dinner if you'd seen the way I ate. How was your chicken, old lady? He looked like a good one. I picked out the best nourished one I could find."

"I wish't those folks was dead, and you too, and me, and everybody!" broke out Miss Phrony suddenly.

"Sho!" said Calvin Parks. "The whole set out, eh? Now I am surprised at you. Just think what all them funerals would come to; why, we should have to call on the town, certin we should. Come now, Miss Phrony, cheer up! I'll go and get my own supper, if you'll tell me what *to* get."

"The Lord will provide!" piped up the old woman shrilly.

"I don't doubt it," said Calvin Parks. "I'll kind o' look round, though; I don't want to give no trouble."

"If you'll set down, Cap'n Parks," said Miss Phrony majestically, "I'll get your supper."

Once more wiping her eyes, she sailed out of the room. Calvin looked after her meditatively. "I didn't think of her scarin' up a tantrum," he said, "or mebbe I'd

have hastened more. I dono, though. Christmas Day, appears as though a man had a right to his time, don't it? Not that I ain't sorry to have discumbobberated her, for I am. I'd like to see everybody well content to-night, same as I be."

"She says you're breakin' her heart!" said the old woman, her black eyes fixed on him.

"Sho! now what a way that is to talk! Why, s'pose I hadn't come home at all; s'pose I'd stopped to supper, as they asked me to; you'd have saved victuals then, don't you see? I wish't I had now!" he added reflectively. "I never thought of her cookin' anything special."

"Supper's ready!" sighed Miss Phrony from the doorway.

In the kitchen a cloth, not too clean, was laid, and on it, with much parade of knife and fork, appeared a very dry knuckle of

ham, a plate of yellow soda biscuit, and a pallid and flabby pie. Spite of himself, Calvin's cheery face fell as he looked on this banquet; but he sat down, and attacked the ham-bone manfully.

"How are ye, old feller?" he said. "I certinly thought I'd seen the last of you, but you come of a long-lived stock, that's plain. Could I have a drop of tea, Miss Phrony? Seems' though something hot would help this spread on its downward way. Fire out? Well, never mind! I'll get along."

"I had the spasms come on so bad," said Miss Phrony, "along about eight o'clock, when I give you up, my stren'th went from me, and I couldn't heave the wood to keep the fire up. I had coffee for you, but it's cold. Would you like some?"

"I guess not!" said Calvin, recalling the coffee at breakfast. "I'll do first-rate.

Well! did you try on your tippet, what? real becomin', was it?"

Miss Phrony's face softened, and she gave him a languishing glance — with one eye, the other trying to see what it was like, with little success.

"'Tis elegant!" she said. "'Tis the handsomest ever I saw. I've put it away — for the future!"

"Sho!" said Calvin. "You don't want to do that. You want to wear it to meetin' next Sunday, Miss Phrony. Any one oughtn't to wait too long to look handsome, you know, fear they mightn't get round to it."

"Oh! not *next* Sunday, Cap'n Parks!" cried Miss Phrony, with another languishing glance. "That is *too* suddin! The Sunday after, p'raps, if you will have it so."

"Just as you say!" said Calvin, struggling with a specially dry chip of ham. "The

sooner the better, Miss Phrony, if things is as you said."

"Have some pie!" cried the lady with sudden tenderness. "Do! I made it o' purpose for you, Cap'n!"

"Did!" said Calvin, and he eyed the pie gravely. "Well, just a leetle portion, Miss Phrony! I made a hearty dinner, and — mince, is it, or — or what?" he added, after the first mouthful. "I don't seem to recognize the flavor."

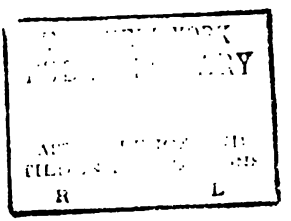
"It's Pie-fillene!" said Miss Phrony complacently. "I got a sample package when I was over to the Corners, and I saved it for you."

"Now that was real thoughtful of you!" said Calvin.

"Do you like it?" asked the maiden coyly.

"It's consid'able different from mince!" said Calvin. "Yes, it is a remarkable pie," he added, after a second bite; "no two

"WITH ONE SWIFT MOTION, CALVIN TRANSFERRED THE PIE FROM HIS PLATE TO THE STOVE."



ways about that. I never tasted one like it. Do you s'pose I could have just a mite of butter on this biscuit, Miss Phrony?"

Miss Phrony assented, and went into the pantry. Then, with one swift, stealthy motion, Calvin Parks transferred the portion of pie from his plate to the stove, replaced the stove-cover noiselessly, and was in his seat and gazing placidly at his empty plate before Miss Phrony appeared with the butter.

"Why, you've eat your pie real speedy!" she cried joyfully.

"It's all gone!" said Calvin soberly. "Not a mite left. No — no thank you, not another morsel! but it certinly is a remarkable pie. Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go in and have a pipe with the old lady."

"So do!" said Miss Phrony graciously. "I'll be in as soon as I've done the dishes, Cap'n."

"Don't hasten!" said Calvin Parks earnestly.

Old Mrs. Marlin was still cowering over the stove, her fingers spread like a bird's claws.

"Did you like your supper, Cap'n?" she asked, as Calvin entered.

"That's what!" replied Calvin enigmatically.

"It's all dust and ashes!" said the old lady unexpectedly.

"Well!" said Calvin. "I dono as I'd go so fur as that, quite, but it was undeniable dry.

"Jesus'll kerry me through!" the widow went on, rocking herself back and forth. "Dust and ashes, and Jordan rollin' past, rollin' past!" Her eyes glittered, and her voice rose in a sing-song whine.

"Hold on there, old lady," said Calvin Parks. "Come out o' that now, and let's be sociable Christmas night. I dono as

you'd think it right and proper to allow of me smokin', what?"

The glitter died out of the old lady's eyes; she stopped rocking, and cackled gleefully; this time-worn joke never failed to delight her. With eager, trembling fingers she brought out a cob pipe from a corner behind the stove, and handed it to Calvin, who filled it from his own pouch and returned it to her. Then he lighted his own pipe, and soon they were puffing in concert. In the pantry close by Miss Phrony was rattling dishes; they sounded like dry bones.

"There!" said Calvin comfortably. "Now you feel better, don't you, old lady?"

The old lady nodded like a Salem mandarin.

"Jordan ain't rollin' so fast now, is it?"

"Nothin' like!" said the old lady.

"Then, since we're all comfortable and peaceful," said Calvin, "I've half a mind to tell you something, old lady."

He paused and seemed to listen; his next words were spoken silently.

"What say? Oh, you go along! I tell you I've got to tell some one, or I shall bust. I can't fetch hossy into the settin'-room, can I? 'Tis betwixt sawdust and kindlin's with these two, but yet I like the old one best."

Then he spoke aloud. "Yes, ma'am! I reelly have — a half a mind to tell you something. Some time or other — not right away, you needn't go thinkin' that, but when I get round to it, you understand — I am thinkin' of — of changin' my condition."

The widow uttered an exclamation, and fixed her beady eyes on him eagerly. The rattling of dishes in the pantry stopped suddenly.

"Yes!" Calvin went on, musing over his pipe. "I've been a rover and a rambler all my life. Old Ma Sill used to say it, and it's true. When I was at sea I'd hanker

for the shore, and sim'lar the other way round. Take last night, now — but no need to go into that. Fact is, it ain't only a woman needs a home of her own," he went on, half to himself. "A man needs it too; his own place and his own folks; yes, sir! And come to find them folks at long last, and find 'em better than what he thought the world contained, why, what I say is, it's a pity if he can't scare up a place. What say, old lady? Ain't that about the way it looked to you and Cap'n along back? You poor old dried up stockfish," he added to himself, "I s'pose you was young once, though no one would suspicion it to look at you."

"Dust and ashes!" said the old woman. "Dust and ashes! Jesus'll kerry me through."

"I shouldn't wonder!" said Calvin Parks. And just then Miss Phrony Marlin came in from the pantry with shining eyes.

CHAPTER XVI

TOIL AND TROUBLE

"HAPPY New Year!" said Calvin Parks. "Happy New Year, Mr. Cheeseman! Happy New Year, Lonzo! happy New Year, the whole concern!"

"Humph!" said Mr. Ivory Cheeseman.

"If this ain't a pretty day to start the new year with, then I never see one, that's all," Calvin went on. "Crisp and clear, everything cracklin' with frost. Hossy's got a white mustash on him like a general. How's trade, Mr. Cheeseman?"

"Humph!" said Mr. Cheeseman again.

Calvin looked at him. The old gentleman's alert cheerfulness was gone; his aspect was grim, and the glance that met Calvin's was stern enough.

"What's wrong, sir?" Calvin inquired

solicitously. "Ain't you feelin' well? You don't seem like yourself."

"I ain't!" said Mr. Cheeseman briefly.

"I want to know!" said Calvin, with an inflection of sympathetic inquiry. "Is it anything you feel disposed to mention, Mr. Cheeseman, or do I intrude?"

"It's something I've got to mention!" said Mr. Cheeseman.

He looked at Calvin again, and meeting his glance of open wonder, his own softened as if in spite of himself.

"Step inside, Mr. Parks!" he said, gravely. "I guess we've got to have a little talk. Lonzo, you might run on home if you're a mind to; that's a good son!"

In the warm, cosy kitchen, where the little stove still glowed like a friendly demon, the old man took his customary seat, and Calvin Parks, his brown eyes very round and large, sat down beside him. There was a moment's silence; then —

"Friend Parks," said Mr. Cheeseman, "I've taken a great interest in you ever since you first come to my store. You've been a man I liked, and a man I trusted; and I've tried to help you when and how I could."

"I should say you had!" said Calvin warmly. "You've been the best friend ever I had, Mr. Cheeseman, except one, and I want you to understand that I appreciate it, sir."

"I've tried," Mr. Cheeseman repeated, "partly on the accounts just mentioned, and partly because I understood you was wishful to marry a lady that is well spoken of by all, and that you appeared to set store by. That's so, ain't it?"

"That's so!" said Calvin briefly.

"Well, now!" the old man continued. "Havin' so helped, and so understood, it ain't real pleasant to me to hear all round that you are goin' to marry another woman."

"*What!*" Calvin Parks sprang from his seat, and seemed to fill the little room. "Say that again! Me marry another woman? What do you mean, sir?"

"Easy there!" said the old man fretfully. "Don't set down in the butter-scotch; it's just behind ye. It's all over town that you are goin' to marry Phrony Marlin a week from Sunday."

He looked up, and after one glance at Calvin, rose hurriedly in his turn.

"There, friend Parks! there! don't say a word! I see by your face it ain't true, and I ask your pardon. Set down, son!"

But Calvin Parks still towered up among the rafters, and his brown eyes blazed down on the old candy-maker.

"It's a lie!" he said simply. "Don't tell me you believed it, Mr. Cheeseman; don't!"

The old man groaned. "I'm a woodenhead, friend Parks; a plumb, dum old

woodenhead!" he said; "but I won't add another lie to that one. I did believe it, and I've been half sick about it all day. I won't say another word till you set down, except to ask your pardon again. I'm an old man, Calvin," he added, with a piteous quaver in his voice, "and I regard you as a son, sir!"

Calvin sat down instantly, and laid his hand on the old man's arm for a moment.

"That's all right, Mr. Cheeseman!" he said briefly but kindly. "We'll forget that part. Now let's get on to the rest on't."

Mr. Cheeseman drew a long breath that was almost a sob, and his frosty blue eyes were dim for a moment. He wiped them quietly with a blue cotton handkerchief.

"I thank you, sir!" he said. "Well, I found the whole street buzzin' with it yesterday. They said you gave her a fur tippet. How was that, friend Calvin?"

"I did!" Calvin's brown face flushed.

" I just plain fool did. She as good as asked me for it, Mr. Cheeseman, and what could I do? If ever I gredged money in my life 'twas that, and me turnin' every cent twice to make it go further. But when she went on about her brown keeters, and the doctor sayin' she must wrop her throat up, and if only she could have a fur tippet it might save her life — and goin' so fur as to name the special one she wanted in Hoskins's window — and Christmas time and all, and nobody seemin' to have any feelin' for them two forlorn creatur's — Mr. Cheeseman, if you're a woodenhead, I'm a sheep's-head, that's all there is to it. So that started the talk, did it? What in caniption makes folks want to talk I don't know! " he broke out. " Darn their hides! "

" That started it! " said Mr. Cheeseman; " and she has seen to it that the talk went on. She was in town all day yesterday, flyin' round like a hen with her head cut off — "

"She'd look a sight better with hers that way!" said Calvin *sotto voce.*

"Buyin' this and that, and givin' folks to understand 'twas her weddin' things. I don't know as she used them precise words, but I do know she said to Hoskins — she was in there gettin' some dress goods, and he told me himself — 'I'll take the blue,' she says, "for Cap'n Parks admires blue, and I have to dress to please him now!' she says."

Calvin Parks groaned. A vision rose before him of Mary Sands in her blue dress, with the sun shining on her hair.

"Then she went to Jinny Bascom's," the old man went on, "and bought her a bunnet. Where she got the money I don't know, nor Jinny didn't. I guess she nor the old woman ever spent more than fifty cents at a time in their lives before; but she got a ten dollar bunnet, no two ways about that; and she was a caution gettin'

it, by all accounts. Jinny has always knowed Phrony; every one round about Cyrus knows them two and their goin's on. Lived mostly on grocery samples and borrowed garden truck till you come to board with 'em; and I don't believe they've fed you high enough to hurt you any, have they?"

"Well! I don't know as I've been in any real danger of apoplexy from over-eatin'," said Calvin slowly; "but I ain't made no complaint."

"I know you ain't!" said Mr. Cheeseman. "That's one thing has made folks anxious. You mustn't take it amiss, friend Calvin. You are well liked all round the neighborhood; and folks *will* talk about what interests them, sir, it's the natur' of human bein's so to do. Well, about this bunnet. Jinny showed her a quiet, decent article, suitable to her years and appearance; but she tossed her head up, and says she,

'I guess not!' she says. 'Show me a bridal bunnet, please, Miss Bascom!' Well, Jinny Bascom runs mostly to eyes and ears, any way of it, and you may suppose that was nuts to her. So she fetched out a white bunnet, and says, 'You goin' to be married, Phrony?' Phrony she tosses her head again, and simpers up. 'I ain't sayin' anything yet,' she says, 'nor yet I don't want it *should* be said till after a week from next Sunday; but if you should see me then in this bunnet, you can draw your own conclusions!' she says. Then she begun to turn her ridic'lous old head this way and that before the glass. 'Cap'n Parks likes a handsome bunnet!' she says. 'He wouldn't wish for me to wear any other;' and goes on like that till Jinny had all she could do to keep her face straight. Now you know, friend Calvin, that was pretty straight talk, and Jinny Bascom wasn't one to keep it to herself; so

you can't wonder it got about, can you?"

"Not a mite!" said Calvin moodily.

"But you could wonder at my bein' taken in by it," Mr. Cheeseman went on, "and I wonder myself. But I was startled, you see, and took aback, and — well, that's all over. Now, what are you goin' to do about this, friend Parks?"

Calvin rose again, running his fingers through his thick brown hair as he did so, and seeming to draw himself up to a portentous height.

"I — don't — know, Mr. Cheeseman!" he said slowly. "I've got to study over it a bit. I can't say right away just what I shall do."

"You won't —" Mr. Cheeseman began; but broke off suddenly, and looked anxiously at Calvin.

"Won't what? Marry Phrony Marlin? I will not! You may lay out your stock on

that. I think I'll be goin' now, Mr. Cheeseman. That my butter-scotch? I'll take it right along, if you say so."

Mr. Cheeseman rose, and began packing the butter-scotch, glancing anxiously now and then at Calvin, who stood lost in thought, his hand still in his brown locks.

"I'll stop the talk in the street, Calvin," he said solicitously. "That I can do, and will before an hour's over. But isn't there something else I can do? I'd take it as a kindness if you'd let me help you, any way, shape or manner that you can think of."

"I guess not, sir!" said Calvin; "full as much obliged to you, though. I guess I've got to work this out for myself. I've got a long route to-day, all round by Tupham and the Corners, and I'll study it out as I go along. I've got to think of — of the woman I hope to marry, God bless her, and yet I've got to think of them two poor misfortunate creatur's that haven't a friend

in the world as I know of except me. And as for the talk," he added, "well, — yes! if you'll stop that I'll be greatly obliged to you. But do it as easy as you can, Mr. Cheeseman! Just say it ain't so, you know, or she was jokin', or like that; let her off as easy as you can, poor creatur'. I don't think she's just right in her mind. Why, she can't be! There! now I'll be ramblin' along."

He started to leave the kitchen, but the old candy-maker caught his sleeve eagerly.

"Friend Calvin," he said, "how did the Christmas trade come out? You haven't told me a word."

"That so?" said Calvin. "This confounded rinktum put it out of both our heads, I expect. Why, I done first-rate, Mr. Cheeseman; first-rate! I've got five hundred dollars laid by now, sir; and as I reckon it out that's enough to start out

on, with a good route, doin' well. What say?"

"Full enough!" said Mr. Cheeseman heartily. "I wish you joy, friend Calvin! Have you got it in the bank?"

Calvin's face fell slightly.

"Not yet," he said. "I only got my full sum made up last night; 'twarn't convenient for some to pay cash, you know, and to-day's bank holiday. But to-morrow mornin', Mr. Cheeseman, at nine o'clock, you look out and you'll see little Calvin on them bank steps over yonder, with his wallet in his hand; and then, Mr. Cheeseman, — then's my time!"

Mr. Cheeseman looked after him as he drove slowly away, his head bent in thought, a very different Calvin Parks from the one who had burst in so joyously an hour before with his New Year greeting.

"He's a good feller!" said the old gentleman. "I never see a better feller than that.

I hope he'll come through all right; but there's just one thing troubles me, and yet I couldn't feel to say it to him. *Where did Phrony Marlin get that money?* "

CHAPTER XVII

NIGHT

THE brown horse had a dull day of it. No cheery remarks, no snatches of song, no cracking of the whip about his responsive ears. He whinnied remonstrance and inquiry now and then, but received no reply. Calvin Parks drove moodily along, his shoulders up to his ears, his head sunk between them, his eyes staring straight ahead. He could hardly even bring his mind to trade, and Mrs. Weazel got five cents off the price of her marshmallows, and was straightway consumed with anguish because she had not tried for ten.

"What's wrong with you, Cal?" asked Si Slocum at the Corners. "Didn't the Pie-fillene set good?"

"That's all right!" said Calvin briefly.

"I was clearin' out a lot of old samples," Si went on, "and Phrony come meechin' and beseechin', the way she does, and I give her the whole bunch. I mistrusted she'd try 'em on you. Come in, won't ye?"

"I'm in a hurry!" replied Calvin. "Here's the goods you ordered; all right, be they?"

"Look so!" said Si; "and taste so!" he added, attacking a cinnamon stick. "Ah! what's your hurry, Cal? Come in and set a bit! It's New Year's Day, you know, and a holiday by rights."

"I know; and I wish you a happy New Year!" said Calvin soberly; "but I must be moseyin' along. Gitty up, hossy!"

"He looks bad!" said the storekeeper, shaking his head as he watched Calvin's retreating figure. "Well, I should think he would, if all they say is true about him and Phrony Marlin. I was bound I'd get

in a hint about her and her ways; he's too good a sort to be grabbed by them cattle; but he shut me right up."

It was night when Calvin reached the Marlin gate. Silently he came, for some hundred yards back he had got out and taken the sleigh-bells from Hossy's neck, to the great astonishment of the worthy animal. The snow was soft and deep, and there was no sound as Calvin drove past the house. At the barn door he paused, and seemed to reflect; started to drive in, then checked the horse and got out of the sleigh. Hastily bringing an armful of straw, he cast it down on the barn floor, spreading it thick and soft where the iron-shod hoofs must tread. Then, without a sound, he led the good beast in, rubbed him down, washed his feet, and gave him his supper.

All the while, though he spoke no word aloud, one phrase was saying itself over and over in his mind; the same phrase that old

Ivory Cheeseman had spoken as he looked after him in the morning.

"*Where did she get the money?*"

The stairs which led to his attic room went up from the shed. Coming in silently, his foot was on the lowest step when he heard voices in the kitchen, one of them speaking his own name. Involuntarily he paused.

"S'pose the Cap'n should find it out!" said the old woman's creaking voice.

"He won't find it out!" barked her daughter. "It's all wopsed up in a bunch, I tell you, and stuffed into the wallet anyhow. He don't know how much he's got. Hark! was that the sleigh-bells?"

"Dust and ashes!" creaked the old woman. "I never thought a child of mine would be a thief, but I don't know as it matters. Hell-fire lights easy!"

"I ain't a thief! said Phrony fiercely.

"I'm only takin' what's my own, or will be when we're man and wife."

"Jesus'll kerry me through!" Mrs. Marlin piped. "Who knows you ever will be, darlin'? He's no fool, the Cap'n ain't, for all his easy ways. You may go too fur. Jordan's rollin' past, rollin' past!"

"Let it roll!" cried the other woman savagely. "If you'll only hold your tongue, mother, I can fix it all right. Do you want the mortgage foreclosed, and us both on the town? You leave this to me! Mebbe he ain't a fool, but he's as good as one for soft-heartedness. If I can't get round that man — hark! was that the bells?"

Calvin Parks stole noiselessly up the stairs. Slipping off his shoes, he crept across the garret room to the cupboard; groped with trembling hands for the wallet, found it, and brought it out; lighted the lamp and hastily counted the money it contained. One hundred dollars — two hundred —

three hundred! He counted again and again; there was no mistake. He thrust the money into his bosom and stood up; his face showed white under the tan.

"She has taken two hundred dollars!" He said. "Poor miserable creatur'!"

He stood perfectly still for some minutes, thinking rapidly. Then, creeping swiftly about the room, light and noiseless as a cat for all his great height, he gathered together his few belongings; the daguerreotype of his mother (saved from the burning house at the risk of his boyish life), the Testament she gave him, Longfellow's poems, and his few clothes; and packed them all hastily but neatly in his old valise. When all was done he paused again; then finding a scrap of paper, he sat down and wrote hurriedly;

"I shall not do anything about the money unless you try to follow me; mebbe you need it more than I do; but you had best take

back the bunnet, *for you will never need that.* Wishin' you well and more wisdom, from

"C. PARKS.

"P. S. You be good to the old woman, or I will tell."

Put out the light now, Calvin! creep softly, softly, down the rickety stairs, testing each board as you go, lest it creak. Out to the barn, where the good brown horse is dozing peacefully. He has had a good supper and a good rest; he is fit for the ten miles that lie between you and safety. Stow the bells under the seat, muffling them carefully in the horse-blanket lest any faintest jingle betray you. Now softly, softly, out over the snow, out past the silent house where the two women are watching for you behind closed shutters; out to the open road, and away!

CHAPTER XVIII

MORNING

THE sun was not yet up, but the sky was brightening in lovely pale tints, pearl and opal and rose, when Mary Sands opened the shed door and tripped lightly down the path to the barn. She unbarred the great doors, and entering the dim, fragrant place, was greeted by a five-fold whinny from the stalls, and a trampling of twenty friendly hoofs.

"Good morning, hossies!" she said cheerily. "I expect you're surprised to see me. I've got to get breakfast for all hands this mornin', and I'm goin' to begin with you. Mornin', colty! mornin', marey! mornin', John! mornin', old hoss! Oh! you naughty old hoss, who ever would have

thought of your actin' that way at your time of life! I *was* surprised — my goodness! who's this in the box-stall? Calvin Parks's Hossy? What upon earth! Why, you darlin', where's your master?"

Hossy's explanations, though fervid, and accompanied by agreeable rubbings of a soft brown nose on her shoulder, were not lucid, and Mary gazed about her in bewilderment.

"You never run away, hossy?" she asked; "you wouldn't do that! Then — where is he?"

Just then a golden finger of sunshine slanted through the dusty window and fell on the harness-room door, which stood slightly ajar. Mary Sands ran to the door and peeped in. There, in the one chair tilted back, his feet on the stove, his head against the farther wall, sat Calvin Parks, sound asleep.

"Oh! you blessed creatur'!" cried Mary

under her breath. She stood looking at him, taking swift note of his appearance.

"He's sick!" she said; "or he's been through the wars somehow. He looks completely tuckered out. There! he is not fit to be round alone, and that's the livin' truth. Oh dear! 'tis cold as a stone here; he'll get his death. Calvin! Mr. Parks! Wake up, won't you? Wake up!"

Now Calvin Parks had been dreaming, a thing that seldom occurred in the simple organism of his brain. He dreamed that he was on a lonely road, with high, rocky banks on either side; and that he was pursued by two black hooded snakes with glittering eyes, that reared and hissed on either side of him, and darted at him as he sped along. He tried to cry out, but found no voice. As he panted on in terror and anguish, thinking every moment to feel the venomed fangs in his flesh, suddenly a bird

came flying down, a blue bird with a white breast, and took the evil creatures one after the other and flung them far from his path. And as he looked, still panting and breathless, the bird turned into Mary Sands in her blue dress and white apron, and she cried — "Wake up, Calvin Parks! wake up!"

He opened his eyes, dim and bewildered with sleep. The vision was still before him, the trim blue and white figure, the pretty brown hair, the hazel eyes full of anxious tenderness. Still bewildered, still only half awake, he opened his arms and gathered the little figure into them. "My woman!" he said. "My woman, before God and while I live."

"Oh! yes, Calvin!" said Mary Sands; and she hid her head on his broad breast and sobbed, a little happy sob.

So they stood for a moment, heaven as near to their middle-aged hearts as to any

boy and girl lovers under the sun; then suddenly Calvin put her from him with a quick movement, and stepped back.

"I forgot!" he cried. "Mary, I forgot. I — I spoke too soon."

"Too soon!" echoed Mary Sands.

"I've no right to you yet!" he cried. "I thought I had; I forgot last night. Mary, I won't ask for you till I have a right to. Yesterday I had the right, or thought I had; to-day I haven't. You — you'd better forget what I said — no! don't forget one word of it, but — but put it away till — some day —" his voice broke, and he turned away with something like a sob.

Mary Sands eyed him keenly; then she spoke in her usual quiet cheerful tone.

"Mr. Parks, would you just as lives light a fire in the stove? It's perishin' cold here."

Calvin started, and flung himself furiously at the pile of kindlings in the corner.

"That shows!" he muttered, as he stuffed them into the stove with a reckless hand. "That shows the kind I am, lettin' you freeze while I talk foolishness. Here!" He took off his coat, and would have wrapped it round her, but she put it back quietly and decidedly.

"You put that coat on again, Mr. Parks. I'll wrap this robe round me; there! now I'm warm as toast, and I should be pleased if you would sit down on that bucket and tell me what's happened; why you come here in the dead of night, and — and all about it."

Calvin sat down on the bucket and looked at her helplessly.

"Mary," he said, "you know I've marked you for mine this long while back."

"Yes!" said Mary simply. "I know that, Calvin."

"I said I wouldn't ask you to take no such rollin' stone as I've been, until I had

something laid by. I put a figger to it. I thought if I had five hundred dollars in the bank and the route doin' well, as it has been right along lately, I could ask you to believe that — that I'd stopped rollin' and rovin', and you might regard me as a stiddy character, and one that was — not worthy of you, not by a long chalk — but aimin' so to be, and with a beginnin' made that way. Mary, yesterday mornin' I had that five hundred dollars, and I was the happiest man in the State of Maine. I was comin' to you to-day, after puttin' it in the bank, and — well, no need to tell you what I was goin' to say."

"I thought you had said it!" said Mary meekly; and there was a twinkle in her voice, though she kept her eyes resolutely cast down.

Calvin groaned. "Don't!" he said. "Don't rub it in, Mary! Last night — I lost pretty near the half of it. Don't ask me how; it's gone, and I've got to airn it

over again. Now — " he spoke rapidly, stumbling over his words, his eyes fixed imploringly on her. " I've got to get away, Mary. I can't stay round here just yet awhile. I made up my mind last night, drivin' over here from that — that place. I'm goin' a-rollin' and a-rovin' once more, till I get that money back."

" Is that so? " asked Mary quietly. " Where was you thinkin' of goin', Calvin? "

" I'm goin' back to the Mary Sands! " he said. " She's in port, loadin' up with lumber for Floridy, and the skipper wants to make a change. I — I'll be glad to see the Mary again, and I expect they'll take me on; what say? "

" I expect they will! " said Mary dryly.

Then, all in a moment, she was laughing and crying on his shoulder.

" Calvin! " she cried. " Calvin, you foolish creatur'! you don't need to go to

Bath to find the Mary Sands. *I'm* Mary Sands!"

"You!" said Calvin Parks.

She glanced up at him, and broke down again in laughter and tears.

"You needn't look like a stone image!" she cried. "'Tis so! I've been Mary Sands right along. It sounded so comical your callin' me Hands, I wouldn't let Cousins tell you. If I've stopped them once I have twenty times. Besides, you was so mad at a woman's bein' owner of your schooner, I couldn't help but laugh every time I thought of it. I s'pose I've been foolish about it, but it's been a kind of play to me all this time. Calvin, you make me act real forth-puttin', but — if you *won't* speak for yourself — there! will you be master of the Mary Sands, afloat and shore?"

She held out her hands with a pretty gesture. Calvin grasped them so hard that she cried out, and his face, white again under

its brown, set in dogged lines of gentle obstinacy, the most hopeless kind.

"I can't!" he said. "Mary, all the more I can't because you are a rich woman. You see that, don't you? I'm sure you must see that, Mary. Soon as ever I've airned that money again —"

"Oh! plague take the money," cried Mary, her patience giving way. "Give it to the cat; she's fitter to take care of it than you are, Calvin Parks. There! you do try me. You ain't fit to live alone, no more than — and my goodness gracious me!" she cried, her voice changing suddenly; "if I hadn't clean forgotten Cousins! Calvin, you've *got* to stay by us, you've just plain and simple got to! Hush! hold your obstinate tongue and listen to me. Cousin Sam had an accident yesterday. He was out with the old hoss of all, and they met the snow-plough, and if that old creatur' didn't leap over the stone wall and smash

the sleigh to kindlin' wood! Cousin Sam's all stove up inside, he thinks, but I'm in hopes not. There's no bones broke, and I guess all he got was a good shakin' up; but anyway, he's in bed, and can't move hand or foot. And I can't take care of him and Cousin Sim, and keep house, and see to the stock and poultry too, Calvin Parks; now I can't! I've *got* to have help!"

At this moment a jingling of bells was heard outside; Mary stepped to the window. "Who on earth comes here?" she exclaimed. "Of all the queer-lookin' turn-outs — do look here, Calvin!"

Calvin looked. In an old-fashioned high-backed sleigh, drawn by an ancient white horse, sat a little old man so wrapped in furs that only the tip of a frosty nose could be seen. He was waving whip and reins wildly, and shouting "Somebody come! somebody come!"

"Gosh!" said Calvin Parks. He ran

out, and Mary Sands followed him wondering.

"Mr. Cheeseman, I want to know if this is you!"

"I got it!" gasped the old man.

"You got it!" repeated Calvin. "You've got your everlastin', I expect, out this time o' day at your age. You come in to the fire, sir!"

Without more ado he lifted the old man in his arms, carried him bodily into the little room, and set him down in the chair. Mr. Cheeseman was still breathless with frost and excitement, and gasped painfully, his eyes starting from his head.

"I got it!" he repeated. "I got it, Calvin!"

"Fetch your breath, old gentleman," said Calvin soothingly. "You ain't got that, anyway. What is it you have got? the rheumatiz?"

"The money!" cried the old candy-

maker. "Your money, friend Calvin, every cent of it, except what was spent, and that warn't much."

Calvin stood as if turned to stone.

"What do you mean?" he faltered.

"I mistrusted all along!" cried Mr. Cheeseman. "I kep' askin' myself all day yesterday, where did she get that money? I never slep' last night for askin' it. Suddin, along about four o'clock this mornin', by the livin' Jingo, I see the whole contraption. I got up that minute of time, hitched up old Major, and drove straight out there to tell you what I suspicioned. You warn't there. They was awake, the two of 'em, and scared at your bein' out all night as they thought; and when I called and knocked they come down, and a sight they was. Talk of witches! 'Where's Calvin Parks?' I says; and they made answer you hadn't come in, and they'd sat up 'most all night for you, and was

scairt to death, and all the rest of it. 'Show me his room!' I says. They made objections to that, and I just cleared 'em to one side and stomped up, and they after me. When they see your things were gone, Phrony give a screech fit to wake the dead, and the old woman set up a gibberin' about Jordan rollin' past, and dust and ashes, and I don't know what all. My eye and Phrony's lit on this paper" — he held out a crumpled scrap — "the same moment, and we run for it together; but I got my claws in it first, and read it out loud. Then, 'Miss Marlin,' I says, quiet like, 'I'll take that money!' 'What money?' she says; and added language that ain't fit for this lady to hear.

"'You know what money!' I says. 'I'm a special constable, and my team is outside. You'll hand me that money or see the inside of the lock-up within half an hour!' I says. She used awful language then; gorry! if you'll excuse the expression, ma'am, I

never heard such language, and I'm no chicken. But the old woman throws up her hands, and screeches out, 'A jidgment, Phrony! a jidgment! Jesus walkin' on the waves, and Jordan rollin' past! Git it out of the bureau drawer!'

"I'm old, ma'am, but I'm tol'able spry. I got to the door and into the front room before Phrony did; and when she see me at the bureau she gave one awful yell and fell down in some kind of fit. I took the money. The old woman was kind of clawin' the air over her, and sayin' 'Dust and ashes! dust and ashes! hell fire's lightin' up!' 'Twarn't no agreeable sight, and I come away. And — and here's the money, friend Calvin, and I wish you joy with it."

Calvin Parks took the money with a dazed look.

"Mr. Cheeseman," he said, "I don't know what to say to you. There don't

seem to be anything *to* say that'll express what I feel — "

"You might introduce me to this lady!" said the old man with a frosty twinkle.

"Darn my hide!" cried Calvin Parks. "Somebody put me under the pump, will they? Mr. Ivory Cheeseman, let me make you acquainted with Mis' Calvin Parks as is to be! her present name is Ha—Sands!"

"Miss Hassands," said Mr. Cheeseman with a magnificent bow, "I am pleased to meet you, I'm sure!"

Mary became rather hysterical at this, and it was necessary for Calvin to soothe and quiet her; Mr. Cheeseman meanwhile inspected the harnesses critically, and expressed his opinion that they was a first-rate set out, and no mistake.

While they were thus occupied, the barn door was suddenly flung open, and a thin, peevish voice cried, "Cousin! Cousin

Mary! where in time have you got to?"

The trio started and turned. In the doorway stood Mr. Simeon Sill, in carpet slippers and overcoat, the latter displaying a valance of flowered dressing-gown. A woollen shawl was tied over his head, and from it his eyes peered disconsolately.

"Where have you got to?" he repeated querulously. "Breakfast time, and the kittle bilin' over, and no table set, and Sam'l waitin' — "

At this moment he caught sight of the three conspirators, and stopped open-mouthed, his eyes goggling in his head.

"Oh! Cousin Sim, you'll get cold!" cried Mary Sands, hastily smoothing her hair. "Do go back to the house! I'm comin' right in."

"Mornin', Sim!" said Calvin Parks genially. "Come out to see the stock, have ye? I call that smart, now!"

"Mr. Simeon Sill, I believe!" said Mr. Cheeseman with dignity. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, sir!"

Mr. Sim looked from one to another, still gaping; finally his gaze fixed itself sternly on Mary Sands.

"I don't know what's goin' on in my barn," he said; "nor I don't know what dum foolishness you folks is up to; but I give you to understand that my brother Sam'l is waitin' for his med'cine!"

THE END.